

Native Writers of Canada: Portraits by THOMAS KING & GREG STAATS

A National Review

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BOOKS IN CANADA

In Gertrude
Stein's Paris

GAIL SCOTT

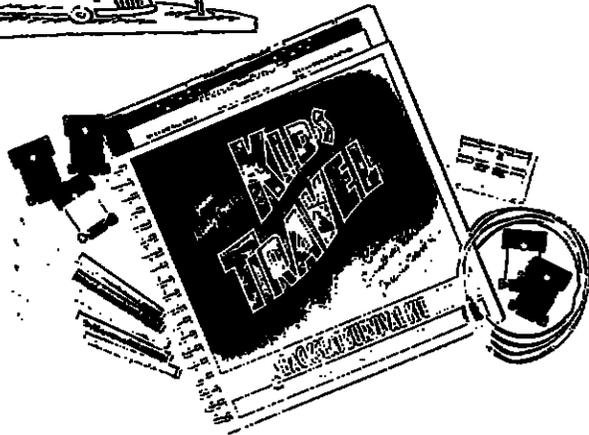
JOYCE MARSHALL: *A Private Place*

VICTORIA BRANDEN *on the
Newly Modest Male*

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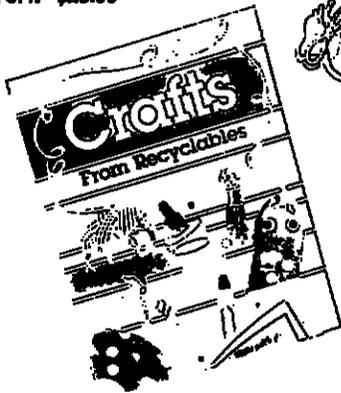
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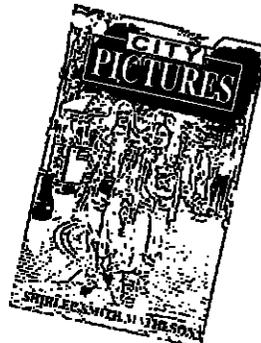
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THE ASSISTANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ONTARIO THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, TOURISM AND RECREATION IS ACKNOWLEDGED

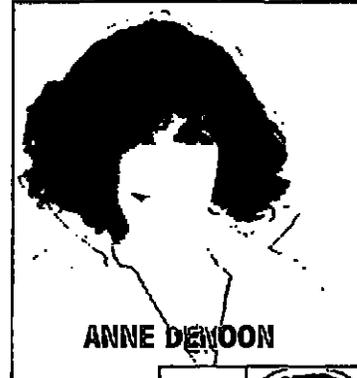
Brian Bartlett is a Halifax poet; his most recent book is *Underwater Carpentry* (Goose Lane). Victoria Branden is the author of *In Defence of Plain English* (Hounslow). Diana Brebner's latest book of poetry is *The Golden Lotus* (Netherlandic). Roger Burford Mason's most recent book is *The Beaver Picture and Other Stories* (Hounslow). Clint Burnham's latest publication is *Fatal Femmes: The Poetry of Lynn Crosbie* (Streeter Editions). Allan Casey is a Saskatoon writer. George Elliott Clarke's collection of poetry *Lush Dreams, Blue Exile* is forthcoming from Pottersfield Press. Clive Cocking is a Vancouver writer. Michael Coren's most recent book is *Aesthetic* (Random House). Mary Dalton's *Allowing the Light* (Breakwater) is reviewed on page 52. Anne Denoon is a Toronto writer and editor. Glen Downie's latest poetry collection is *The Angel of Irrational Numbers* (Beach Holme). Scott Ellis is a Winnipeg writer and editor. Brian Fawcett's *Gender Wars: A Novel and Some Conversation about Sex and Gender* is reviewed on page 33. Douglas Fetherling's novella *The File on Arthur Moss* (Lester) and his *Selected Poems* (Arsenal Pulp) are both coming out this autumn. Maureen McCallum Garvie is a freelance writer who lives in Kingston, Ont. Carole Giangrande is the author of *Missing Persons* (Cormorant), a collection of short fiction. Sheryl Halpern is a Montreal writer. Susan Hughes is a Toronto-based writer and a critic for the *Irish Times*. Thomas King's novel *Green Grass, Running Water* (HarperCollins) was short-listed for last year's Governor General's Award. Matthew Kudelka is a Toronto writer and editor. Josée Lambert is a Montreal photographer. Alec McEwen is a professor of surveying engineering at the University of Calgary. Elaine Kalman Naves is the author of *The Writers of Montreal* (Véhicule). Dusan Petricic and Nancy Reid are Toronto illustrators. Jack Ruttan is a Montreal cartoonist and writer. Gail Scott is a Montreal writer; her latest book is *Main Brides* (Coach House). Fred Sharpe is a Toronto puzzle enthusiast. Greg Staats is a Toronto photographer. Glenn Sumi is a writer living in Toronto. Margaret Sweatman is a Winnipeg writer; she recently adapted her novel *Fox* (Turnstone) for the stage. Drawings throughout the issue are by Peter Taylor, a Toronto illustrator. Joel Yanofsky is a writer living in Laval, Quebec. ♦



VICTORIA BRANDEN



GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE



ANNE DENOON



THOMAS KING



GREG STAATS



Enough, Already

I AM GETTING awfully tired of reading verbose and irritating letters from authors who disagree with their reviewers. Let's be quite clear here: reviewers are critics; they write critiques! There is nothing in the Great Law of Writing that says that every review shall be glowing or that every reviewer shall be sensitive and attuned to the mind-set of the author. I have been reviewed, and I have variously agreed and disagreed with the remarks of my reviewer, but I am not so thin-skinned that I have ever found it necessary to fire off a caustic missive in rebuttal. Rather, I have allowed my fragile ego to be boosted by the positive reviews and tried to learn something constructive from those that were negative.

Gary Brannon
Kitchener, Ont.

Rebutting Rebutted

CHRISTOPHER MOORE's review of Scott Reid's *Lament for a Notion* ("Laws and Language," April) is of necessity political rather than literary and suffers accordingly. Mr. Moore employs the classic technique in political response, that of using far more words to say what is wrong with a contention than outlining the contention itself. This makes his article less of a review than a rebuttal.

The word "justice" is used a lot in the "review," but there is little evidence of it when Mr. Moore assesses what Reid has to say about language-law excesses. How quickly he passes over the "hob-

bling" of English in Quebec. Nowhere does he note that the Supreme Court of Canada, not to mention the lower Quebec courts, has found the laws forbidding English unjust. So has the United Nations Human Rights Committee, and more recently the US state department saw fit to cite Quebec for its language laws in its yearly roundup of global human rights problems.

I remain to be convinced that English Canadians are learning French in large numbers in the rest of Canada, but I must concede that, according to a report recently presented by the Conseil de la langue française, Quebecers are learning English in terrifyingly large numbers, and that on the island of Montreal francophones will be a minority by the year 2000. This is not the intention of government policy, but is happening in spite of it.

This undermines Mr. Moore's contention, expressed in reverse: "...Reid has to argue that language laws have played little part in the recent advance of French within Quebec." Like so much of Mr. Moore's article, this statement proceeds on the unexamined assumption that there has been a "recent advance of French within Quebec." Now this no longer appears to be the case.

Mr. Moore's references to French hospitals and French video sales in the rest of Canada are hardly a credit to the official languages policy, which is federal. Hospitals are provincial and videos, thank heaven, are still in the realm of the private sector.

Of course, things are different in Montreal at the federal St. Anne's Veterans Hospital, where a mostly anglophone patient corps is being administered to and treated by a mostly francophone staff. This was recently confirmed by an "enhanced investigation" by the official languages department. While the investigators took a boys-will-be-boys attitude to the result, they agreed that the complaints were

valid. This saw some local press, but not much else. Strange, considering that St. Anne's is Canada's last veterans' hospital, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of their exploits to preserve democracy.

I would earnestly ask the editors of *Books in Canada* to insist that reviewers spend more of their time reviewing a book and less rebutting its findings. While this practice is acceptable in the cut and thrust of politics, one expects that the world of letters will demand that worthwhile literary standards be upheld.

Christy McCormick
Montreal

Humour Problem

IN REGARD to Gordon Phinn's letter ("We Are Not Amused," April), I would like to make some comments.

I read Victoria Branden's "Get That Grin Off Your Face!" (February), which Gordon discusses in his letter. But unlike Gordon, I actually enjoyed her perspective, finding her both witty and intriguing. I even contemplated writing to *BiC* stating as much. Well, after ruminating on Mr. Phinn's letter (and the majority of others), I'm sorry now that I didn't.

I reread Gordon's letter three times. (I'm not dyslexic.) And I'm still not sure what kind of an axe he's trying to grind. "Maybe a broad axe?" you say. Maybe. But obviously, by the tone of it, he was not amused.

Also, despite my numerous perusals, I'm still not sure what he was trying to convey by alluding to Stephen Leacock in his concluding sentence. I have assumed (and maybe wrongly — one should never assume) that the statement was meant to be derogatory.

Well, Gordon, I happen to be a fan of Mr. Leacock's, so if it was meant to be derogatory (and even if it wasn't), I wish to say this: it's a pity that the majority of *BiC*'s letter-writing readers (appear to) allow their taste for

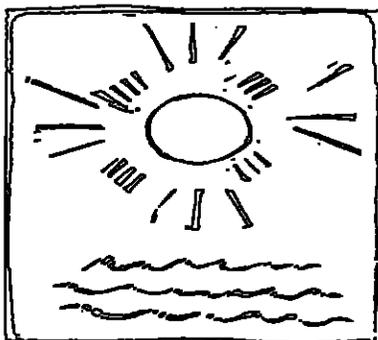
humour to reside only within their mouths. I assume that's where they keep it bottled up, for I didn't see any of it in their correspondence (with the exception of Paul Sheppard's letter) in the April issue. At least not in the way I saw the wit-imbued ink of Victoria Branden's pen flow onto the parchment of February's BiC.

As well, Gordon (and other disgruntled letter writers), here's some food for thought: "Just like a mind, a sense of humour is a terrible thing to waste."

Since Mr. Phinn has included in his letter a small bibliography of risqué writings, I would like to recommend one for him (and the rest of the trio) to indulge in: it's called *The Garden of Eden*, by Ernest Hemingway. We could all learn something about tasteful understatement from this (gentle)man who, according to biographers, was neither a stranger to sex nor a Calvinist.

Also, Mark Twain, writer and humorist — who chose to appeal to the "belly and the members" rather than the intellect or libido — might interest Gordon, since he likes writings that appeal to the member (penis: *vulgar, slang vernacular* for). Though I think Mark Twain was referring to other limbs. Gordon might try reading *Huckleberry Finn*. Especially the performance of "The King's Camelopard" and the events leading up to it — chapters XXI through XXIII (there's even nudity!). It might help him with the humour problem.

Mark D. Millar
Sydenham, Ont.



Reasonable Doubt

I MUST TAKE Eric McCormack to task for his review of *Descent into Madness* by Vernon Frolick ("Stranger than Fiction," March). It is a sensational story about a killer in northern British Columbia, but of the many things this book is, it is not what Frolick claims it to be: the true story of Mike Oros.

Frolick was the Crown prosecuting attorney in the case, although he never mentions this in the book itself. In his foreword, he states that "Only those of us on the inside knew the whole picture. It was our case. Our special problem. No outsider would ever have access to the real story. The whole truth."

This is an admirable premise, but anyone who claims to know "the whole truth" about a situation is immediately suspicious and creates reasonable doubt about his intentions. Contrary to Frolick's claim, being "an insider" has been a detriment rather than a benefit. He pictures himself holding some kind of secret truth simply because he has access to Oros's now famous diaries. But what he has given us is his dramatization of the diaries, not the diaries themselves. McCormack, instead of sloughing this off, needs to take Frolick to task for this.

Frolick creates reasonable doubt about his knowledge of Oros. In non-fiction we are asked to accept that what is said and done is the truth. For McCormack to pass it off as "inventive flights and occasional purple passages" does not hold the author accountable for what he has undertaken: a biography of a real person.

For example, after Oros has sex with a woman (described with titillating, graphic details) he knocks her unconscious. After seven lines of monologue, Frolick tells us that the woman hasn't heard a word Oros said. Well, then, who did? Did Oros write it all down verbatim? Was Frolick there to record it? There is reasonable doubt.

Frolick writes that he would find it "repugnant" if someone were to glorify Oros and trivialize the death of Corporal Mike Buday, the RCMP officer who was killed by Oros. But in his attempts to glorify the death of Buday, Frolick trivializes his life.

The fact that Buday was a good cop who died needlessly in the line of duty creates sympathy. But when the author spends pages portraying Buday as a hard-living police officer who liked to watch pornographic movies and who once took a chain-saw to his friends' front door because he was too drunk to find the keys, we lose sight of why we should like him. Is this the kind of man who is capable of considering his job as, in Frolick's words, "a sacred trust"?

One begins to question the author's intentions. Is this Buday's story or is it Oros's — or is just Frolick's? And why would McCormack think that this kind of confusion is acceptable from a biographer?

In this book, Frolick gives us little reason to believe him. Simply because someone says "I'm telling you the truth" does not mean that he or she is really doing so. The integrity of the author is something that is earned, not something that is claimed.

Philip Adams
Whitehorse, Yukon

Truth Will Out

THE LAST paragraph of your military history overview, "Tidying Up the Battlefields" (April), by Robert M. Stamp, states that John Bryden is the Liberal MP for Hamilton West.

If this is an example of Bryden's "reputation for ferreting out embarrassing secrets," as the reviewer claims, it's a particularly well-kept one. The riding is represented by Stan Keyes.

Miriam Simpson
Hamilton, Ont.

Tide of Events

IN A RUSH, once again, to make a display of the sartorial splendour of his satiric jibes, Michael Coren has, I fear, completely misread the intentions of the film *Shadowlands*, both in his *Globe* article and his April column in *Books in Canada*. One senses a slight resentment at populist poaching on élitist territory.

Shadowlands concerns itself with one of the major themes in C. S. Lewis's life and work: the position and possible functions of suffering in a predominantly Christian society. There are several scenes of Lewis giving public lectures to adoring audiences on what one gathers are the redemptive qualities of human suffering. Added to the Oxford-dons-in-the-pub discussion-group scenes (they called themselves the *Inklings* and included J. R. R. Tolkien and Charles Williams), these give the impression of an intellect engaged with the classic dilemmas of the spiritual life. Debra Winger's character, an American divorcee, arrives to shatter the relative complacency of Lewis's male intellectual society.

Only through surrendering his heart completely in love to her does Lewis come to know the rather transcendent scouring job "God" performs on our feeble defences. The film, I feel, advances that rather untrendy notion that for a Christian the beloved can take the place of Christ in one's personal life, and that through the sacrifice entailed in the death of the beloved and in the subsequent crisis of faith (detailed by Lewis in *A Grief Observed*) one comes to fully understand the role, if not perhaps the necessity, of suffering and sacrifice.

The fact that C. S. Lewis was a writer is only of peripheral importance to the film's intentions. He might as well have been a doctor or a lawyer. The film is not about writing, or the writer's life; it is about an ego-based

intelligence arriving at the point of complete surrender to what a Christian might call "God's plan" and what some of the rest of us might acknowledge as "the overwhelming tide of events."

Gordon Phinn
Streetsville, Ont.

The Culture of Nature

THIS MORNING, as my body was swept through that most unnatural of landscapes, the Montreal metro, I read Linda Leith's review of Sharon Butala's book *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* ("At Home in the Landscape," April). I must object to the use of the word "nature" in both the book's title and in Leith's review. I take no exception to Butala's life, crises, meramorphosis, or writing. I simply question the use of the word "nature" and "natural" to describe life on a Prairie ranch.

True nature, if I can make such a conceptual leap of faith, is that which lies beyond culture. With this in mind, how can anyone ascribe the term "natural" to a landscape that includes corrals of domesticated animals, ululating men (note Butala's own reference to a scene from a Roy Rogers film), cowboys guiding animals over the Prairie, etc.? Such scenes are entirely of the country, but that does not make them *natural*. The two are far from synonymous.

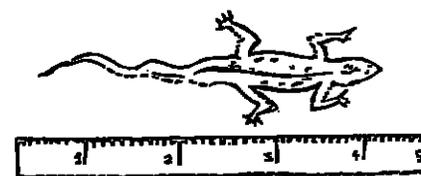
For example, when one looks at the barren, mountainous landscape of the Scottish highlands, one may see it as a rugged, *natural* landscape. After a bit of background reading, however, one would instead see a rugged, *unnatural* landscape, forever stripped of its forests by men who took the wood for profit and to create grazing grounds for imported sheep.

Similarly, one now looks at the Canadian Prairie and sees miles of rolling grasslands, but how much of that

is original, natural, tall-grass Prairie, and how much of it is commercial cropland and cattle-grazing land? In 200 years, will people visit the former old-growth forests of British Columbia and be enchanted by the "natural" hectares of barren rocks, cut out in nicely plotted squares? Will people someday visit the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and marvel at the "naturally" clear water, devoid of cod and fish poop? When we see a starling alight on our veranda, do we ever stop to think that it is an exotic European species, brought here a hundred or so years ago because some eccentric "naturalist" thought it would be nice if his neighbourhood contained every bird species ever mentioned by Shakespeare?

I am not saying that we should not enjoy open spaces, nor be transformed by them. But we should, I believe, maintain an awareness of what it is we are experiencing. As humans, we are cultural beings more so than natural ones, and by extension we almost never find "true" nature. Instead, we create our own versions of it. As such, very few of us ever question the meaning of nature as it is outside of our cultural interpretations. If we turn nature into a cultural artefact, this leaves no room for the existence of something that lies outside of human intervention and culture. Unless, that is, we come up with a new word and conceptual framework. How cultural!

Ed Hawco
Montreal

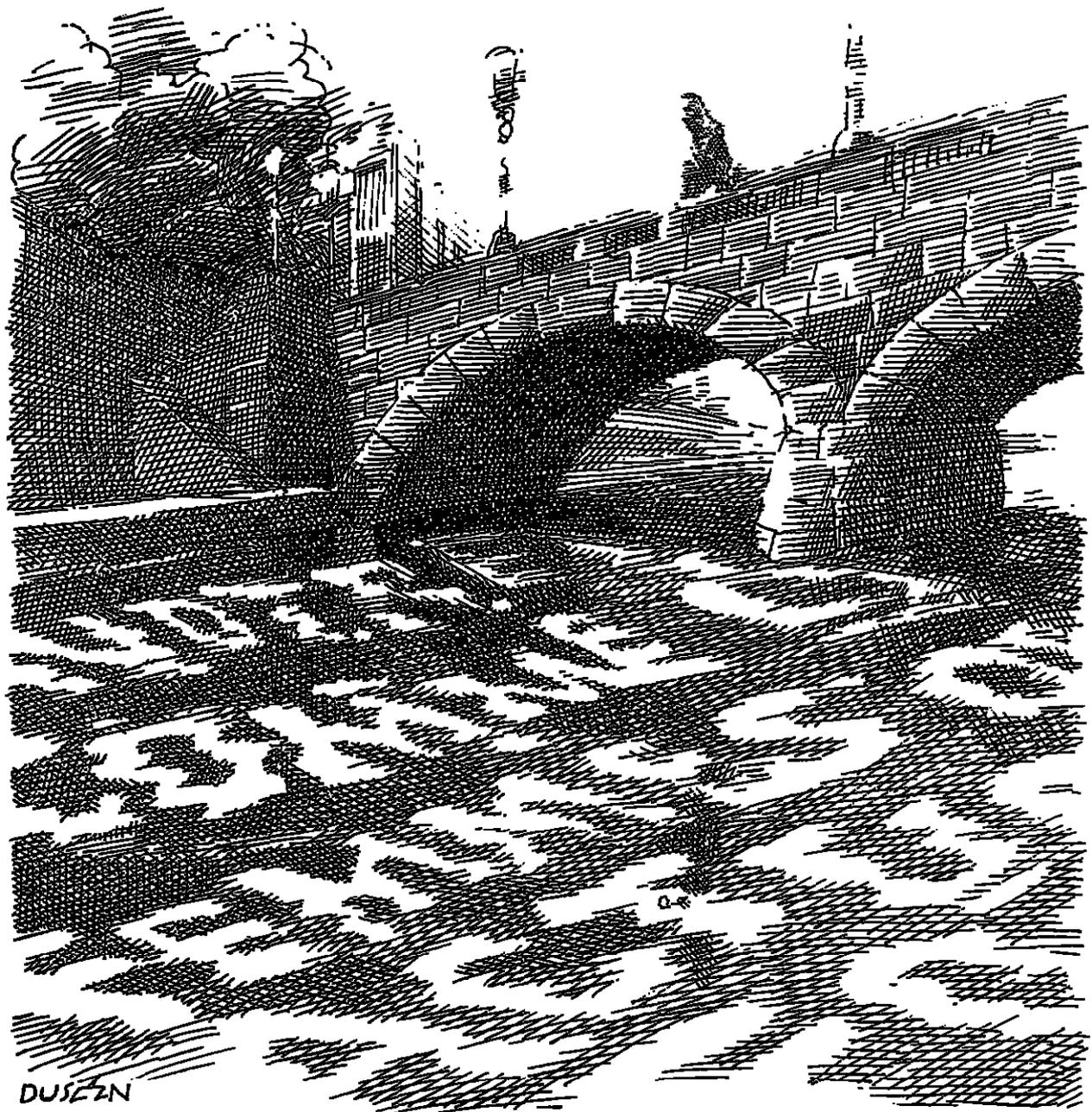


Letters may be edited for length or to delete potentially libellous statements. Except in extraordinary circumstances, letters of more than 500 words will not be accepted for publication.

There's No Such Thing as Repetition

A short novel written in Paris

by GAIL SCOTT



DUSEZN

For many writers, Paris is synonymous with "pleasure." Hemingway went there to study "sin"; Stein did her experimental work and lived with Alice, far from the conventions of her country; James Baldwin adopted Paris too (less noticed by the canon); also, there was surrealism, new wave films, May 1968. And yes, Paris offers an incomparable abundance of beauty, history, culture. But during a recent extended stay there, the "Paris" I had imagined quickly proved to be a projection of my culture. A construct that was, in its hackneyed romanticism, one small indication of how we structure racism — and other crimes of indifference — in our minds.

HE'S IN PARIS! Paris, where writers for generations have gone for nourishment.

She sets to work immediately. Walking. Or in her studio, takes down notes, writes down quotes, to pin down how aspects of ideology, attitudes towards language, memory, affect narration (her project). Also, to soak up ambience as, earlier in the century, Stein and Hemingway.

She walks down curved white streets with a delicious sense of déjà-vu. Smiling because Gertrude Stein said (writing in the neighbourhood) there's no such thing as repetition. "No matter how you say it you say it differently."

Surprised to see so many beggars.

Evicted squatters, from Africa, huddle near a métro.

"I listened to people (Stein's voice again). I condensed it in about three words..." (speaking of her portraits).

What about the context? the current writer wonders.

Meaning Paris's contradictory layers: wars, revolutions. But also, art, beauty: extraordinary care of detail. She surveys the elegantly curved walls of her studio; outside, signs saying *Onglerie, Maître Parfumeur, Fromagerie* (300 cheeses, 20 kinds of butter)...Feeling slightly guilty.

Still, in bed at night, dreams of autumn light shining on the Seine. So romantic. One's heart skips a beat. Bittersweet. The literature of happy exiles, *poètes maudits*, postcards. Getting up to close the window to keep out the din of traffic.

On the boulevard, two men of North African origin in the bright green overalls of city cleaners vacuum up the dog shit.

"I wasn't situated outside of time, but subject to its laws, like characters in a novel," another voice (Marcel Proust) complains.

She also wanted to escape.

To read, to write, to dream.

She buys a suit of black.

Reads 19th-century novels.

Haunts cafés with names like *La Coupole*, once haunted by "exiled" writers of the '30s (rich Americans). Who enjoyed the way Paris offers space for thinking, the sense of dignity created by the graciousness of buildings, of people in their clothes and perfume, the excellence of food and wine and books.

Strolls on the Pont Neuf.

Standing straighter to avoid a scraggly North American look. Reflecting on why this improves one's sense of self. Which in turn seems to serve clarity of thinking. Smiling wanly at her dream last night that she'd become "The President," she leans over the bridge to take in the sun setting on the iron-and-glass roof of the magnificent Grand Palais at the curve of the river.

A man of African origin, soon to be also pausing there, taking in the view,

will be accosted by some cops and asked for his papers.

Possessing (she reads later in the paper) only a photocopy, he panics, jumps into the river, and drowns.

"If I wanted to make a picture of you as you sit there, I would wait until I got a picture of you as individuals and then I'd change them until I got a picture of you as a whole," Gertrude Stein says louder.

She speeds up various streets in the hallucinating light. Past a fading slogan, *Socialisme=immigration*, from a rightist party during the last French elections. Fights through crowds of tourists. Rushes up rue de Rennes, full of people (many homeless) from every possible nation. Having expected, it's true, a Paris more...traditional 19th century? More surrealist? More nouvelle vague film? More... "integrated" culturally?

"...renaming by the European," injects an African-Canadian voice (M. Nourbese Philip) "...was one of the most devastating and successful acts of aggression carried out by one people against another."

Anthony Griffin scores across her mind.

Entering cafés, she orders coffee, water, wine.

At night, lies down between intensely patterned sheets under a single shelf of books (only two in English — she's proud of this). The television flickers with some old Canadian documentary called *La vie des esquimaux*. A child in an igloo. Learning how to sew. Looking up wonderously at her mother, also sitting sewing in a cotton housedress. The whole somehow framed like an ideal family scene from a '50s *Chatelaine* magazine.

She may have something to cover up.

Dresses, paying strict attention to the shine of her shoes.

Gets a better haircut.

Strolls out past shop windows advertising the fashions of the season: designer clothes in uneven burlap (made of silk), safety pins of silver, miming poverty. In another window, two headless male mannequins wearing \$1,000-suits make violent gestures towards each other.

"What I am trying to make you understand is that every contemporary writer has to find out what is the inner-sense of his contemporariness," Stein pipes up again.

But she wanted to escape. Maybe be a narrator. Muffled in

the white skies, the grey-white streets, time-curved walls, of Paris. Richly treed courtyards. Squares with fountains. Buildings like the exuberant Second Empire Opéra, with its wings, domes, statues, *oeils-de-boeuf*, ceiling illustrated by Chagall. Walking, breathing, tasting: all the senses feasting.

Focused on this completely, she strolls through an art-nouveau entrance to the métro. Sitting on a bench. "Vos papiers, s'il vous plaît," says a cop to two men of African origin on her left, a veiled woman with a baby on her right. She is asked for nothing (although she lacks a visa).

"Superstition expresses infrastructure," she says (trying to improve).

Misquoting Marx. Who said *superstructure* expresses infrastructure. The word "structure" conjuring up the iron- and glass-work on roofs of museums, stations, ornate 19th-century commercial "passages." Also, blooming like petals over métro entrances. Signs of economic ebullience under thriving capitalism. Which economics, for Marx, sustained individualist ideology.

She scurries through the traffic. Wondering if the African family in the art-deco flat above her also gets harassed. Entering the Palais Royal where Colette used to live. Silent, delicious, like so many Paris gardens hidden from the street. Trees in rows, squares of flowers, arcades that served to shelter aristocratic children, then commerce, gamblers, hookers, before becoming genteel again. She turns towards a café on the left with curtained windows, with pastries like only the French can make. A young man, stepping from behind a column, asks for a handout. His pale eyes bright with hunger. She looks around, then grumpily refuses, afraid he'll grab her change purse if she takes it out. Noting he is neater than her: also, she believes he is sincere.

Walking home she leans over the Pont des Arts, and looks into the Seine.

It blinks back at her ironically.

Proust resentfully attributed to his father the notion he was subject to time's laws (consciousness).

She buys Wittgenstein's conversations (to think of something else; he makes her think of consciousness).

Strolls up St. Michel, watching her reflection in shop windows.

Past a snowy ad for Canada (irked at the repetitive images of snow, toques, "funny accents" in Paris, referring to back home).

Feeling morally superior, the way tourists do when they detect faults in their host.

Heads towards the domed, columned Panthéon, dedicated *Aux Grands Hommes*. Eye taking in shoe styles, pheasants (complete with feathers) in a butcher's, cheeses wafting all their myriad of smells through a transom window. Past a baker (remembering not to nasalize *à la québécoise* when she says *pain*, bread). Past the iron fence of the Panthéon, where

France's great men are buried. Where feminists annually put flowers, a reminder there were women, too, in the French revolutions. It's October 26. On a *terrasse* next to l'Hotel des Grands Hommes, where the surrealist movement started, she opens up her paper. It says:

A rightist party (anti-immigration) has swept the Canadian west.

"[I shall]... attempt to analyse and understand the role of language and the word from the perspective of a writer resident in a society which is still very colonial — Canada," adds M. Nourbese Philip.

The cars whiz round the square.

She gets up and walks.

"The Twentieth Century created the automobile as a whole, so to speak, and then... built it up out of its parts." Stein pipes up again. "The United States... created the Twentieth Century.... The 19th century was roughly that of the Englishman... And their method... is that of 'muddling through.'"

But — in creating the whole, what of the parts remain?

She walks by a bookstore. Her coattails juxtaposed, in reflection, on a display of Balzac novels. Whose critics said he created bankers out of Mohicans in redingotes. Reminding her, in Canada they pushed through a railway allegedly for the *creation of a country*. Destroying Métis culture.

Turns towards St. Sulpice (her favourite square in Paris). Of which Henry Miller wrote: "St Sulpice! The fat belfries, the garish posters over the door, the candles flaming inside. The square so beloved of Anatole France with that drone and buzz from the altar, the splash of the fountain, pigeons cooing...."

Thinking (offended by his words): "Realism is the view of One, of pseudo-synthesis."

This she both hates and envies.

Continues towards Montparnasse. Where Hemingway wrote: "Paris belongs to me."

Turns towards a nice café with green striped awnings. White cups inscribed *Café de la Place*. Excellent espresso. With a square of good dark chocolate by the sugar lumps on the saucer. On the *terrasse*, face turned towards the sun, she tries to change the subject. *Que faire* (today). Writing in her agenda: "Definitely le Louvre. Maybe Les Folies bergère (new socially conscious version, complete with a great Tunisian singer 'found' in the métro), an old Hepburn movie. The fine Arab Institute library. Balzac's house, where he hid from his debtors." In Paris, they have everything. Again she opens up the paper. It says a famous Kenyan athlete has jumped into the Seine to save an elderly Frenchman trying to kill himself. Shortly after, the Kenyan received two letters from the préfecture: one, a citation of merit; the other, an invitation to leave the country.

Proust later tried to catch up with lost time.

Strolling over the Pont Neuf, she looks into the river, into

the white light of Paris gathered on its surface.

"The United States... instead of having the feeling of beginning at one end and ending at another... had the conception of assembling the whole thing out of its parts," Gertrude Stein persists.

She climbs back into bed. A ray of light shines through the gauze curtains. Grey with soot, from the cars on the boulevard outside the art-deco design of her balcony. The traffic sounds are deadening (as in a Godard film). In her dream, she strolls past Joyce's former home, boulevard Raspail, and Stein's, rue de Fleurus, trying to lose herself in the curves of streets, pockets of courtyards, fearing all the time the 19th-century buildings are about to dissolve in a pile of white dust. Behind her flows the Seine, breathing forth, some poet said, the very air of Paris. "The air of Paris is a republican notion," her dream-speak says: "a synthesis."

"The other thing which I accomplished was getting rid of nouns," trumpets Gertrude Stein again.

Was Stein's whole, then, about synthesis in movement?

In her dream she's walking. Not a noun but (possibly unfortunately) not a verb, either. Rue de Rennes so thick with pedestrians, it's difficult to move. Now and then a beggar, with a child, sometimes very large, lying on his or her knee for hours, as if asleep. She goes into La Coupole, *Bar Américain*, very air-conditioned, frequented by well-dressed elderly women from Montparnasse going through their afternoon-tea rituals, the odd anti-Soviet Russian who could go back now but naturally doesn't want to, some lesbians.

She strolls, knowing she's ridiculous. Thinking the narrator can no longer be a single notion. Thinking the "synthesis" required for a work of art involves absorbing the reader into the vortex of the author's vision. To seduce excludes breakage. Thereby, excluding others or only partially, caricaturingly absorbing them. But how to keep in a state of listening? All these interceptions. At the same time, maintaining faith in one's way of doing, one's mark as an artist. She strolls past her reflection in the mirror of a wine store: dark eyes, very short lashes.

Also slightly sloppy.

She strolls under the white sky of Paris.

It looks down on her ironically. ♦

Quotations in this piece are from Gertrude Stein, How Writing Is Written; Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu, II; M. Nourbese Philip, She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks; Henry Miller, Tropic of Cancer; Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast; the Paris newspapers Le Monde and Libération.

Anthony Griffin was shot in a Montréal parking lot by the policeman Alain Gosset, who was recently acquitted of involuntary manslaughter, for the second time, by an all-white jury.

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Native Writers of Canada

A photographic portrait of 12 contemporary authors

by THOMAS KING and GREG STAATS

IN THE SUMMER of 1992, I was in Alberta trying to stay out of the way of the cast and crew of the CBC movie *Medicine River*. I had brought my cameras with me and was taking candid shots of the production when I ran into Greg Staats, a fine-arts photographer who was doing some of the stills for the film.

Greg wasn't all that impressed with my cameras or my technique.

"You a photographer?"

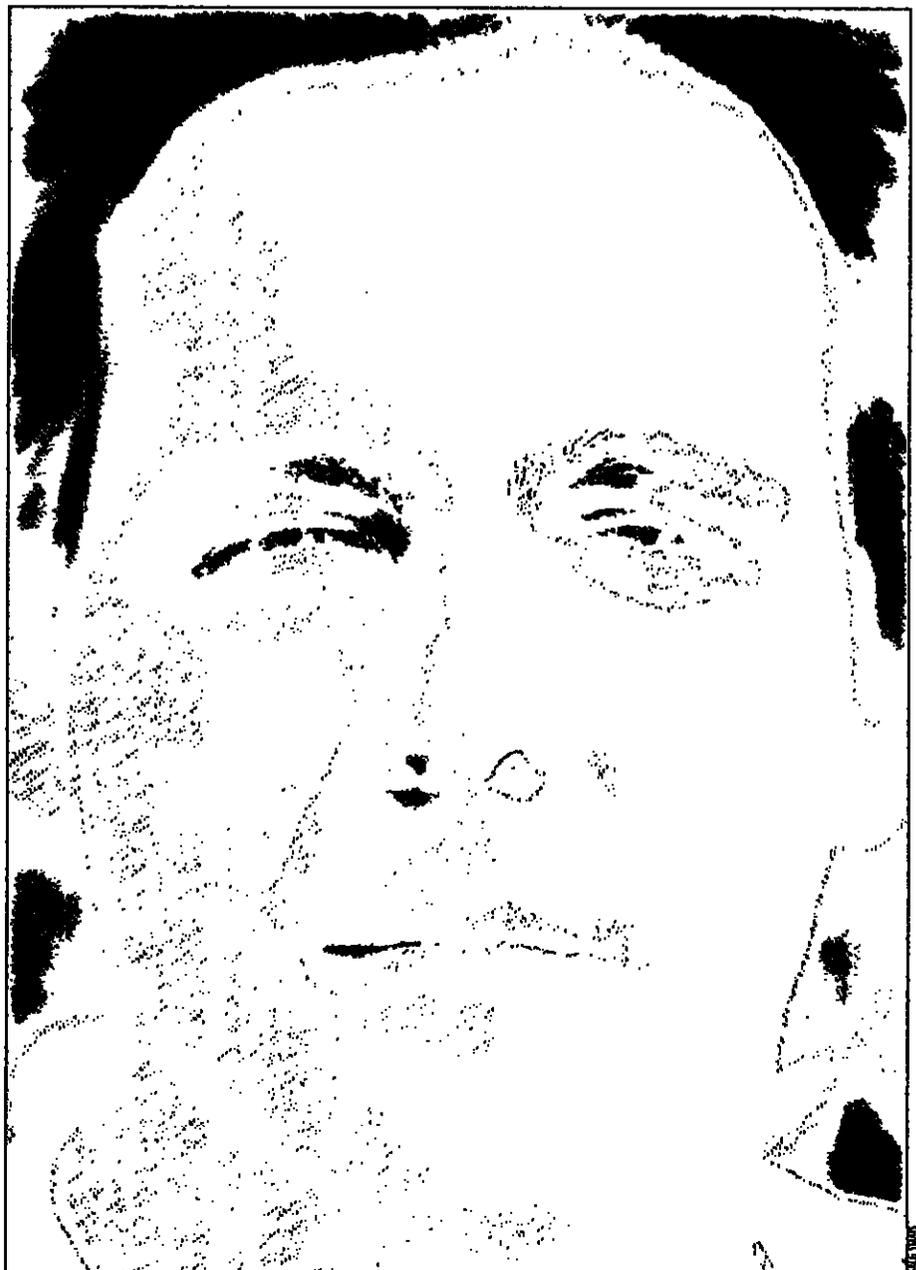
"You bet," I told him.

Well, it wasn't a lie. I had worked as a photo-journalist for a rather dreadful magazine in Australia and gone on from there to do some rather dreadful work for several better magazines.

One hundred and fifty years ago.

To make a boring story short, Greg and I struck up a conversation about photography (what a surprise) and Indians, a conversation we carry on today.

**Drew Taylor,
Someday
(Fifth House, 1993)**





© 1988 DASH

Rita Joe
Song of Eskasoni
(Ragweed, 1988)

Last year, part of our continuing conversation became a book project to photograph traditional and contemporary Native artists in North America. Greg is a Mohawk from Brantford, Ontario, and has been taking pictures of Native people for years.

"So where we going to start?" he wanted to know.

"How about I photograph you and you photograph me," I suggested.

"Oh, right."

"Okay, so where do you want to start?"

Greg has a way of asking just the right questions. "What do you do when you're not pretending to be a photographer?"



REG TILLY

Tomson Highway
Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing
(Fifth House, 1989)



REG TILLY

Beatrice Masionier (Culleton)
In Search of April Raintree
(Pemmican, 1983)



Lee Maracle
Ravensong
(Press Gang, 1993)



"I pretend to be a writer."

So we started with writers, and, as we began arranging the shoots, we made an interesting discovery. While oral storytelling traditions have always been and continue to be a rich and extensive part of Native life, stories written in English and French — poetry, drama, and prose — are a relatively new phenomenon of the last 30 years or so. And with the exception of historical figures such as E. Pauline Johnson and Mourning Dove and contemporary writers such as Harry Robinson and George Clutesi, most of the first wave of Native writers in Canada are alive and well.

Jordan Wheeler
Brothers in Arms
(Pemmican, 1989)



This may not seem like a big deal, but against the general backdrop of literature, where most of the writers we chase in high school and university have been dead for a couple of centuries, it gives Native literature a rather vibrant and fresh feel.

The 12 writers whose photographs appear in this article represent, in a loose way, the range of Native writing in Canada and the range of writers, beginning with elders such as Rita Joe, Maria Campbell, and Basil Johnston, running through established writers such as Tomson Highway, Lee Maracle, Daniel

Basil Johnston
Indian School
(Key Porter, 1988)



Ruby Slipperjack
Silent Words
(Fifth House, 1992)

David Moses, Ruby Slipperjack, Drew Taylor, Beatrice Mosionier (Culleton), and Jordan Wheeler, to newer storytellers such as Louise Halfe (poet) and Richard Wagamese (novelist), both of whom published a first book this year.

Nor does the list end here. Photographs of writers such as Jeannette Armstrong, Beth Cuthand, Wayne Keon, Duke Redbird, Marie Baker, Tina Mason, Monique Mojica, Shirley Cheechoo, Eden Robinson, Bernelda Wheeler, Marilyn Dumont, Michael Paul Martin, and others could just as easily have been featured.

Daniel David Moses
The White Line
(Fifth House, 1991)



Louise Halfe
Bear Bones and Feathers
(Coteau, 1994)



So this fall, Greg and I are planning a trip through Canada and the United States, cameras in tow, to visit Native artists and writers where they live and work. Greg is enthusiastic but cautious.

"You're not going to make any dumb Edward Curtis jokes on this trip, are you?"

"Why would I do that?"

"Meanness," he said. "I've read your novels."

So I promised Greg no Curtis jokes — I had a couple of good ones, too. I'm a man of my word.

But, say, did you hear the one about the Mohawk from Brantford and the...?

THOMAS KING

Richard Wagamese
Keeper 'N Me
(Doubleday, 1994)



Maria Campbell
Halfbreed
(McClelland & Stewart, 1973)

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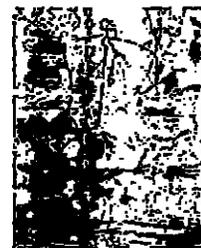
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BOOKS IN CANADA

A Private Place

Joyce Marshall's subtle fiction encompasses memory, love, fear, disorder, concealment, and defiance

by
ANNE DENOON

I DON'T WANT this article to be about old age," Joyce Marshall told me in our first conversation, "or about a 'neglected' writer." Hastily, and truthfully, I assured her that I had no such intentions. I had already come to understand that Marshall's literary career has been not merely lengthy, but unusually varied and productive. She is best known as a writer of accomplished

and distinctive short stories, but she has also been a poet, an essayist, a critic, a novelist, an editor, a translator, a writer in residence, and a memoirist. And the remarkable thing is not that she has done so many things for so long, but that she has done all of them so well.

It is true, however, that the publication in 1993 of *Any Time At All and Other Stories*, her first book of fiction since 1975, did not attract as much attention as it deserved. It was called one of the year's best books by three different writers in *Books in Canada*, and received an affectionate tribute from George Woodcock in the *Ottawa Citizen*, but drew little comment elsewhere. Although McClelland & Stewart's decision to issue it in the paperback New Canadian Library series was undoubtedly intended to reflect Marshall's literary stature, it may inadvertently have lulled book-page editors into believing the collection to be a reprint. But Marshall's many fans, who track her work in quarterlies and anthologies, have been quietly passing the word about it. And I suspect she has always been something of a writer's writer, for her work has never been neglected by her fellow authors. Her first novel was reviewed by Robertson Davies and Northrop Frye (among others) and her first short-story collection drew raves from Margaret Laurence and Marian Engel. In *Survival*, Margaret Atwood devoted a page to Marshall's oft-anthologized, best-known (and least favourite) story "The Old Woman," and the stories in her current collection were selected by Timothy Findley, who also contributed an enthusiastic and perceptive afterword.

SHE WAS born in 1913, in Montreal, the eldest of five siblings in a family whose roots in Quebec run four generations deep. One of her grandfathers was a journalist, the other an Anglican clergyman; her father was a stocks-and-bonds dealer, her mother a reluctant housewife. Her childhood memories, particularly of summers spent in



what was then a village on the St. Lawrence, have provided material for a cycle of stories she has been writing since the mid-1970s, which are known as the Martha stories, after her fictional *alter ego*. In one of them, "Avis de Vente," she observes: "Writers have more childhood than other people or perhaps they just carry more of it with them." She had a particular rapport with her father, and a somewhat less tranquil relationship with her mother. "My mother and I were screaming at each other all the time," she says now, "that's not exaggerated in the stories." But she and her three sisters "were definitely taught and told that the sky was the limit, that we could do anything. I found out later that it wasn't really true, but I'm very glad we had that beginning."

She earned her first money from writing in grade school: three dollars from the Women's Christian Temperance Union for a prize-winning essay on the topic "How to Make

Parker. For these she was paid "three or five dollars each." She also wrote some serious poetry during the war years, such as "Lost at Sea," a moving elegy for a drowned child. Her 1982 story "My Refugee," included in her new collection, captures with a blend of irony and pathos the atmosphere of this time. She was involved in progressive politics, participating in various demonstrations, and as she now puts it, "talking a lot." Formally invited to join the Communist Party, she did not do so, although she knew many Communists. "It was very hard then, unless you were crazy, or unless you happened to be very, very lucky [financially], not to be political," she says. She recalls feeling rather scornful of Elizabeth Smart's first novel, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, which was published about the same time as her own, because of its very apolitical romantic exaltation.

But *Presently Tomorrow* also caused its share of outrage. Set in Quebec in the early 1930s, it combines Depression-era social consciousness, acute observation of character, and a touch of farce, in an unusual and surprising coming-of-age story. One of its two protagonists is a naïve young Anglican priest whose interest in social change causes him to be temporarily banished from his urban parish and sent to oversee a retreat for bored matrons at a girls' boarding school. The other is a

girl who "ever since she could remember... had been a 'Young Writer.' She was going to be famous when she grew up, and clever and admired." She and three schoolmates observe the young cleric from afar, and one of them — though not the one you expect — seduces and abandons him, rejecting his contrite offer of marriage. Much was made of the fact that the girl was the aggressor, and several reviewers refused to believe it possible. Marshall heard that someone said of her, "She's either writing about things she knows nothing about, or she's a bad little girl who knows things she shouldn't." She was a woman of 33 at the time. Robertson Davies, while giving the book a generally favourable review, wondered, referring to the seductress, how such an unsuitable girl could get into a nice girls' boarding school.

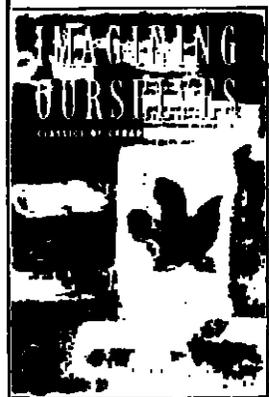
Reading the novel today, I was struck by Marshall's clear-eyed, unsentimental view of sexual desire through the wary eyes — and body — of a teenage girl, who comprehends it not as a threat to her respectability or purity, but to her autonomy. This is a theme that runs throughout Marshall's fiction: the struggle, usually by a woman, to establish an identity, a sense of self, and the fight to maintain it. "We have to own ourselves," she wrote in one of her first published stories, "And the Hilltop Was Elizabeth," from 1938.

Presently Tomorrow was also reviewed, in a University of

'People who came along later don't realize how open things were in the '30s and '40s. The effect of the war was very bad for women; it shoved us right back in the '50s....'

the Best of Life." "I knew what to tell them," she recalls. "To avoid tobacco, liquor, and drugs — wasn't I clever?" In her 1975 story "The Accident" she would write, "success in childhood... depends in large part on one's gifts as a mimic." From 1929 to 1932, she was a boarder at St. Helen's, an Anglican girls' school in the Eastern Townships. This period also bore literary fruit, in her novel *Presently Tomorrow*, published in 1946, and in the story "Senior Year," from 1986, which is included in *Any Time At All*. She went on to McGill University, becoming the first woman to be appointed to the *McGill Daily's* senior editorial staff, and graduated in 1935, as winner of the university's English language and literature medal.

She moved to Toronto in 1937, at first supporting herself as a sales or filing clerk. Canada Council grants had yet to be invented, and Marshall had resisted her family's admonishments to "qualify as a teacher or a typist, and write at night." But her stories had begun to win prizes, and to be published: in *Fiction*, produced in 1936 by the Toronto Writers' Club, and in *Queen's Quarterly*, in 1938. From 1938 on, she contributed regularly to *Saturday Night*, publishing short essays such as "How Not to Write," a wry recipe for literary procrastination, as well as a number of poems chronicling the perils of modern love in a world-weary, ironical style reminiscent of Dorothy



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Toronto paper, by a student-veteran named Robert Weaver. A couple of years later, when he joined CBC Radio, he asked Marshall to contribute some stories, first for "Canadian Short Stories" and later for "Anthology," two programs that were rare and financially — as well as artistically — essential outlets for short-story writers at a time when the form was generally unwelcome to publishers. She also edited scripts for the CBC, and served as first editorial reader for "Anthology" for most of its duration. From 1950 to 1983, 23 of Marshall's own stories had their first "publication" on the CBC, appearing only later in print.

By 1957, she had produced her second novel, an account of the brief, doomed marriage of an unsophisticated but perceptive young woman and an outwardly successful but profoundly damaged man. Set in Toronto just after the Second World War, *Lovers and Strangers* evokes a cityscape that is now almost completely lost, inhabited by a cast of young artists, architects, and bohemians, some of whom are based on real-life figures of the period. Ironically, given its strong — at times claustrophobic — sense of place, *Lovers and Strangers* was put out by an American publisher, Lippincott, and received a review in the *New York Times* by one Walter O'Hearn (a Canadian, Marshall tells me) that should be read by any cultural nationalist who cares to discover how far we have come in 35 years. His argument, in essence, was that the book could not be taken seriously simply because it was set in Toronto. Again, Marshall's treatment of her heroine's sexual awakening is unorthodox, and Katherine's schooling in pleasure becomes a form of knowledge that empowers rather than enslaves, making her equal to her manipulative but inwardly weak husband, who at one point tells her "this is how I like you, beautiful and quiet." Katherine's eventual flight from this "marriage with death" is inevitable, yet Marshall never treats the man as a monster. When I remarked upon the unconventional approach to sex in her two novels, Marshall said, "People who came along later don't realize how open things really were in the '30s and '40s. The effect of the war was very bad for women; it shoved us right back in the '50s, which was the only decade when I was not at home in the world."

MARSHALL's editorial tasks at the CBC led her into a different sort of work, at which she would also excel. In the late 1950s, she began doing translations for *Tamarack Review*, and was asked to translate a story by Gabrielle Roy for "Anthology." As she noted in an article written in 1988 for *Canadian Literature*, she had at the time "never met anyone who'd done even a single translation...never...taken a course in translating...never read a single book — or for that matter an article — on the subject," so she devised her own "gruelling and desperately difficult" method, which consisted of "translating fairly literally then fighting the results into English." Roy sub-

sequently asked Marshall to undertake the translation of *La Route d'Altamont*. Together, the two writers wrestled three of Roy's books into English, and established a friendship that was strong enough to survive what Marshall describes as the "knock-down, drag-out fights" between them over the finer points of syntax and idiom.

In the process, Marshall concluded that translation is really a kind of literary impersonation, "an extended exercise in dialogue-writing," which ultimately made her more conscious of her own style and individuality as a writer. She was soon in demand as a translator, and one of her assignments was a centennial-year project for Oxford University Press, *Word from New France: The Selected Letters of Marie de l'Incarnation*. Marshall's introduction to this book not only reveals her own scholarship and intelligence, but demonstrates how a skilled fiction writer's sensitivity to character and detail can enrich the study of history. She won the Canada Council translation prize in 1976, but by the end of the decade, Marshall had given up translation, "weary," she wrote in *Canadian Literature*, "of scraping my mind raw over thoughts that weren't mine."

Marshall still lives and works in Toronto, is still active politically (she marched in demonstrations against the Gulf War), and retains her connection with CBC Radio (she was a reader for this year's literary competition). Her book-filled apartment near the university was once the studio of Barker Fairley, and a small painting of his hangs in her sitting room, alongside a reproduction of his portrait of her friend Gwendolyn MacEwen. Apart from two years in Scandinavia in the early 1960s, financed by a Canada Council writing grant, a stint as writer in residence at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, and occasional travels to Mexico, France, and Greece, she has remained in her adopted city. Quebec, she said in 1977, in an eloquent essay included in the anthology *Divided We Stand*, "is still and simply my home," though she visits it rarely. She thinks that leaving home — in both the familial and geographical senses — is essential for a young writer, if only to achieve a certain perspective. "I wouldn't have been able to write those [Martha] stories if I'd still been living in Montreal," she says. "When I go down there now, it's too different, too changed." But she has had occasional moments of sharp recall: on one visit, she "was driving along on Westmount Boulevard and I suddenly saw a house up high, shored up by concrete. And I remembered that that was where, taken out on walks by the nurse, I used to run my fingernail along, and drive her cuckoo!"

Similar details in the luminous "Martha" stories may tempt readers to perceive them as undiluted autobiography, and one of Marshall's sisters recently complained to her that certain incidents in one of them had never taken place. But



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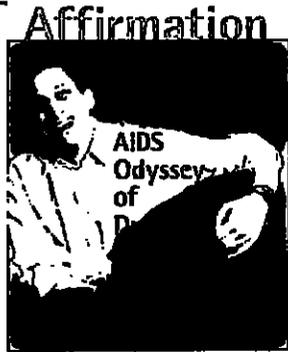
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the transformation of life into literature is never so simple. "I think one of my themes, actually, is the nature of memory," Marshall says. "I'm trying to catch that elusive thing: did what you think happened, really happen." Perhaps "The Heights," from *Any Time At All*, best epitomizes this aspect of Marshall's work: it is a complex, multilayered story that suggests that what we believe to be true may be just as significant — and necessary — as what is true. "The idea for that story did start with someone I met as an adult; she remembered the Japanese tennis players, but everything else she remembered quite differently from the way I did," she says. In "Senior Year," too, the protagonist can only grasp the meaning of events retrospectively, with the help of a forgotten witness.

Many of her stories, it seems to me, also have some element of mystery, or of secrecy: the unfathomable otherness of "The Little White Girl"; the letters that Lars, in "A Private Place" seeks to decipher; the longstanding adulterous affair in "Any Time At All"; the lurking, unknown menace of "Corridors." Marshall always allows her characters their psychological autonomy, saying, "I don't try to explain human behaviour, because I don't think it can be explained. There's absolutely too much of that nowadays." Many of them fight, sometimes to the death, to preserve their emotional privacy. In the devastating "So Many Have Died," Georgiana Dinsborough cherishes thoughts of a long-hidden affair, and in Marshall's most recently published story "... That Good Night" (*Room of One's Own*, December 1993), another woman who is about to die refuses to surrender the memory of her secret love to the well-meaning friends who are caring for her.

ALTHOUGH she feels strongly that the process of writing is essentially mysterious, Marshall has a well-deserved reputation as a perfectionist. "Quite often I have stories for years, before I can be done with them," she says. "I do feel that when they're published, they may not be perfect...but they exist. Once I started fiddling I'd end up doing the whole thing over." She usually thinks about her stories for quite a while before she starts to write, and makes "an awful lot of notes on scraps of paper," but her first drafts are very quick and, she says, both "skimpy and too wordy. Wordy, because I write rather carelessly...I try not to write so well that certain sentences are going to become my brothers and sisters and I won't be able to bear to get rid of them. Skimpy, because in cutting down I also add more details. With any luck, I get what I call a good draft that, bad as it may be, has a certain force to it, which I try to keep, although I may change the tempo." Though she will admit that "It's exciting, at times even fun, to get a thing absolutely right — or what I think is right — so that I can let it out into the world," the process is more often an agony. "Not only do I have to think of the words," she says, "but I have to go through whatever the char-

acters are going through. I don't do it from the outside; I have to feel it, I have to see it, I have to hear it, as much as I can. And every time I revise, I still have to go through it."

Though ill health slowed her down briefly last year, Marshall is again writing six days a week, aims for five pages a day, and has several projects under way. One that has been evolving for some time is a volume of literary memoirs, including portraits of the astonishing number of well-known figures in Canadian letters who have been her friends and colleagues. So far, she has published her recollections of Gwendolyn MacEwen, Morley Callaghan, Ethel Wilson, Dorothy Livesay, Adele Wiseman, and Gabrielle Roy in various periodicals, including this one. She recently completed a piece on Elizabeth Smart, and has drafted a chapter she calls "Dying Time," about the 1980s, "when all the writers seemed to be dying... Margaret Laurence, Marian Engel, Gwen... all these people died before their time. We said, 'There's someone, somewhere, who doesn't like writers.'" Another project is a possible third novel, built around the brilliant, shocking trio of stories, "So Many Have Died," "Windows," and "Paul and Phyllis" (the first included in her current book, the others both published in periodicals in 1977). My immediate interest in the novel elicited a groan of protest from Marshall; having decided to make major revisions, she was unwilling to commit herself as to its completion, though we can always hope.

In the meantime, two new stories are slated to appear: a Martha story, "Like All of Us," dedicated to Timothy Findley, and another, called "The Student," drawn from a chance encounter in Paris some years ago. They will be published in the Summer 1994 issues of *Fiddlehead* and *Matrix*, respectively. But what we really need is a durable, hard-cover *Collected Stories* of Joyce Marshall, as well as reissues of her two novels, which would fit comfortably into the New Canadian Library series. In his afterword to *Any Time At All*, Timothy Findley writes that reading Marshall's stories, "you find yourself thinking, *I didn't know that. Or: I'd forgotten that. And very often: How did she know that? I thought only I knew that!*" This," he continues, "is what makes all reading worthwhile: provocation on the one hand, revelation on the other." When I asked her whether her life as a writer would have been different had she come of age in the era of writers' grants and fellowships, rather than in the Depression and war years, she replied: "If I'd had more money, I might have done more writing. But I don't complain about what I've learned; if I had been a rich person, I wouldn't have learned as much."

Anyone who reads Marshall's work will notice that she has learned a great deal. And what she knows — about memory, love, fear, disorder, concealment, defiance, and the endlessly curving road that leads towards "the clear single answer to everything" — makes her one of our very best short-story writers. ♦

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JOSEPHA

A PRAIRIE BOY'S STORY

by Jim McGugan
illustrated by Murray Kimber

IT WAS LATE in the last afternoon, long after the school bell, when I made good-byes to Josepha. Prairie wind ruffled his hair. Barefoot, he stood silent and still as a Saturday flag-pole. The sun flickered between leaves in the windbreak poplars, licking his face in shadow and light.

Shadow and light. And a farm cart's four wheels groaned and whined not far down the gravel track. A farm cart coming for Josepha.

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No Sex, Please, We're Gents

Unlike their sexy sisters, men just aren't doing it any more

by VICTORIA BRANDEN

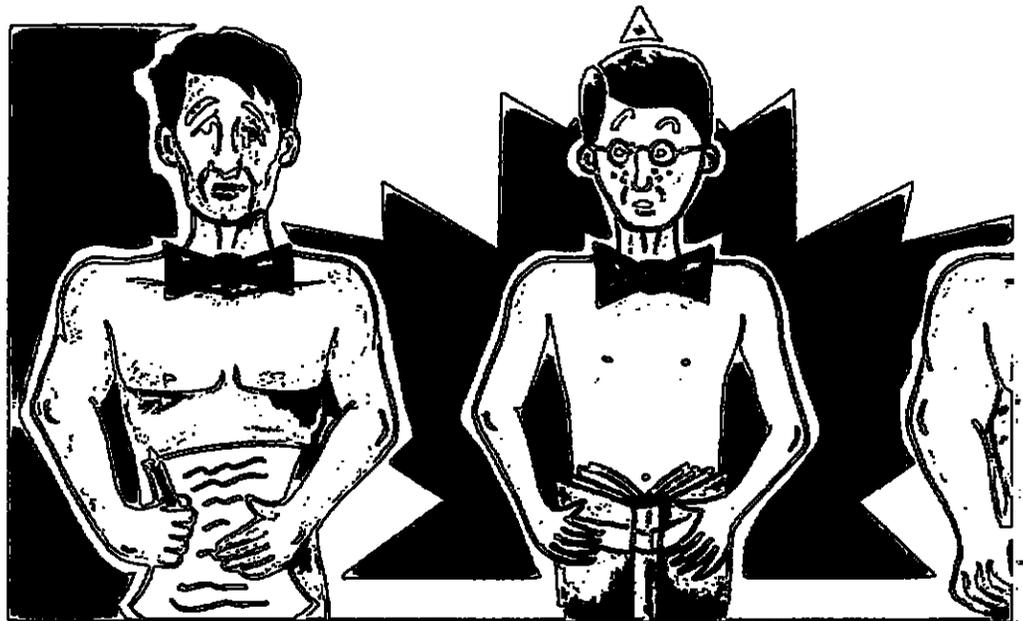
IN THE DEAR dead days beyond recall, when everyone was young and slender and the world full of promise, the sexy novel was the exclusive province of males. It wasn't displayed in good bookstores, but had to be sought out in stealthy little shops on squalid little streets.

I inadvertently caused a panic in one such emporium; my boss had sent me out to hunt for old issues of a comic book he collected, and since browsing in bookstores was more fun than drudging in the office, I stretched the search to the point of absurdity, leaving no stone, however unlikely, unturned. When I bounced into this dank hole, I disturbed a

crowd of furtive men absorbed in the study of tattered magazines and sleazy paperbacks. Everybody jumped guiltily, and either dropped their reading matter as if it had caught fire or began juggling it in frantic efforts at concealment.

As I have seldom had much success in arousing panic in male breasts, it was fun in a weird way, but there was such a sinister feel about it that I resisted the temptation to stay and bug them. Toronto's Yonge Street strip looked clean and wholesome after that scabrous little dump.

Then a great change in social values took place: suddenly sex and obscenity were indispensable in the serious novel by male authors. I remember reading one highly praised work that was lauded for the "authenticity" of its dialogue: the characters' vocabulary was confined almost exclusively to four words — shit, fuck, piss, asshole. "Fuck" was once the ultimate obscenity, the cry of someone tried beyond control; now it has roughly the same emphasis as "damn" or "heck."



The rejection of prudery was one factor in the new values; another was the provision of an outlet for male boasting, often to the point of exhibitionism. Verbal exhibitionism, if you'll allow the phrase. This trend produced several generations of what might be called the Stud Hero. Some stud heroes had hearts of gold (Chandler's Marlowe); some were simply insatiable, wolfing down victims like so many canapés (J. P. Donleavy's satyrs); and some were so irresistible to women that they were often moved to give pleasure to their clamorous adorners more by generosity than by lust.

Associated with boasting, although not necessarily with the stud hero, was a pervasive male fantasy about heroines of flawless beauty, so that we got repeated descriptions of gloriously lovely creatures who were typically pure and chaste and felt desire only for the hero. Perhaps the loving descriptions of flawless female bodies were calculated to arouse lust in the reader; perhaps they attested to the hero's sexual pow-

ers. In any event, he demanded, and got, perfection.

As remarked in an earlier article ("Get That Grin Off Your Face!" February), women are now writing with equal enthusiasm about sex and using the four-letter words as frequently as did the gents. Something new has developed, however, among male writers. Some daring souls have broken the pattern. I'd given up on the Serious Novel, because I was really tired of laborious sex scenes; but a conscientious researcher must not quail at disagreeable tasks, and after doing my stint on the girls, I began thinking about the role of sex in men's novels. And you know what? There are almost no sex scenes!

There's sex, as a normal part of human life, but none of the exercise-manual stuff, and for the most part, surprisingly few four-letter words. What can this mean? Have men writers advanced so much that they no longer have to inflict these

weary gropings upon us? Did men simply get bored with it, once it was no longer shocking? Did it suddenly strike them that there was nothing either brilliantly comic or deeply artistic about saying "fuck" and "shit"?

The pendulum seems to be swinging toward a different male attitude: we rarely find the old-style catalogue of female charms. Flawless beauties still turn up, inevitably, but only in the minor leagues, and they have a dated, almost quaint air. Their absence is noticeable in the work of Canadian male writers.

Let's look at the mystery department. Both Jack Batten's Crang and Howard Engel's Benny Cooperman have an eye for feminine pulchritude, but neither of them is a voracious stud constantly seek-

ing someone to devour, sex-wise. Benny is rather endearingly reticent about his romantic life, though he is (blush) interested in a nice girl called Anna, who visits his bachelor pad after an escape from villains. Anna says she needs a very hot bath, her defence against "all known and unknown terrors." Benny watches the steam billow from under the door. "Later...but that's nobody's business." (That's the stuff, Benny. Give us credit for some imagination. No need to slug us with a blunt instrument.)

Crang has a steady girlfriend whom he tenderly loves, and we are given to understand that they have splendid times in bed. He follows a pattern I have come to think of as the "Oh, how he loves her!" school, first documented (I think) in Ngaiio Marsh's work, where Roderick Alleyn loves only Troy, with a pure, uxorious tenderness that is frequently a considerable bore, as it is occasionally with Crang and his Annie. Their relationship is a baffling one, however, because

in many respects, Annie seems to be Jack Batten. She has his job as film critic on CBC's "Metro Morning," for one thing. However, let's be grateful: we aren't afflicted with explicit accounts of their grapplings in the sack.

A curious element in the Batten books (and this occurs with increasing frequency in contemporary fiction): instead of painstakingly specific details about sex, we get painstakingly specific details about food and clothes. Every garment assumed, every mouthful ingested, by Crang and Annie is carefully documented:

I put on a gray tweed jacket over my dark blue workshirt and jeans....I had on a dark blue crewneck sweater, blue workshirt, slightly worn but recently dry-cleaned jeans and Rockport walkers....A pin-striped light wool suit, single-breasted, four buttons down the front of the jacket. The pinstripes were red. So were the buttons. I wore it with a plain white shirt, no tie, and brown suede shoes.

Thus embellished, Crang visits a restaurant: "I ordered avocado salad, blackened catfish and a half bottle of Chablis...a cherry cobbler for dessert." Another restaurant, a few pages later: "I ordered a dish that had chicken, shrimp, noodles and peanut sauce. Annie asked for the special hamburger...stacked a slice of tomato, another of onion and a splash of mustard on top of the hamburger...."

The scrupulous accounting of these details reminds one of the latter-day treatment of sex, where no move or action is omitted; is this a kind of sensory substitute? Did some teacher of creative writing tell Jack Batten he must list every carrot stick, buttonhole, and street sign?

Robertson Davies presents some strange contradictions. His characters suffer sodomy and various other unpleasantnesses, but he simply tells us, and lets it go at that. In *Fifth Business* he has one of the most hilarious seduction scenes ever written. The narrator, one-legged Dunstan Ramsay, has fallen embarrassingly in love with a beautiful, brainless young girl who torments him cruelly. He is devastated when he catches her in a passionate embrace with an older woman, Liesl, whom he detests. Liesl is everything the lovely girl is not: intelligent, cultivated, sophisticated, and hideous. Later that night after he's gone to bed (wooden leg leaning against the wall) Liesl appears in his room, "smiling her ugly smile," and announces that she's going to bed with him. Ramsay angrily rejects her, but Liesl believes rape is a two-way street and assaults him. Ramsay defends his honour valiantly, hopping about on one leg — he is an expert hopper — and all chivalry is forgotten. They punch each other's faces, knock each other down, the wooden leg is wrenched from hand to hand to slug one another, Ramsay breaks her nose. Afterwards they make it up, have a civilized conversation, eventually go amicably to bed, and remain lovers for life.

So here we have a reckless departure from the rules: an ugly



woman who is nevertheless exciting and desirable. However, in *Rebel Angels* we return to something like romantic love, as embodied by Maria Magdalena Theotoky, the academic man's sex object. Maria is studying New Testament Greek, her cradle languages are Hungarian and Polish. Although the limited creature has no modern Greek, she "knows Classical Greek pretty well. And French and Spanish and Italian and German and of course Latin — the Golden, the Silver, and the awful kind they used in the Middle Ages."

She effortlessly reads Rabelais's 16th-century French, and airily quotes Paracelsus. Although she's only 23, her scholarship is at the level most professors laboriously achieve at 50.

Have men writers advanced so much that they no longer have to inflict these weary gropings on us?

Such qualities are no doubt as sexy to Davies's characters as big breasts are to lesser men, but Maria has those, too. She is dazzlingly beautiful, as well as brilliant, kind, gentle, and generous. On top of that she's rich! And destined to get richer!

Davies is far too elegant and sophisticated a writer to inflict crass details on his readers, but Maria is a sexual fantasy, the dreamboat of the post-doctoral fellow. Everyone is in love with her, and she crops up in subsequent books, when she has a baby and is a perfect wife and mother in addition to everything else. Personally, I think she's a mistake; I didn't believe in her for a minute, any more than I believe in the golden Venuses of lesser authors. With all the good will in the world, I can't suspend disbelief sufficiently to find Maria credible, and she diminishes the power of the book.

I'm a late-comer to Timothy Findley; for some reason I was sure I wouldn't like his work, and the first book I read, *The Telling of Lies*, struck me as rather tedious. A murder mystery, and surely the wrong genre for him, though it had a good idea buried in it. Then I read some charming short stories, and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, which completely captivated me. There's a good deal of excrement involved, but that's unavoidable on an ark, with two of all species contributing. Explicit sex absent.

Michael Ondaatje seems to be preoccupied with semen: In *the Skin of a Lion* describes Clara "...making love to him [Patrick] in a car, catching his semen in a handkerchief and flinging it out onto bushes on the side of the road. ..." It's environmentally objectionable, a rather nasty form of littering, but otherwise pretty tame. *The English Patient* has a boy dancing by a fire, "arousing himself, his genitals against the colour

of fire." Afterwards, a man "crawls forward and collects the semen which has fallen on the sand. He brings it to the white translator of guns and passes it into his hands."

Well, it's a lovely present, and every sperm is sacred, but what's the white translator to do with it? Perhaps I'm just a soulless philistine, but it doesn't strike me as poignantly beautiful, which I'm sure was the intent. On the other hand, it can't be condemned as prurient.

We now come to Mordecai Richler, whom I've kept to the last because of my disinclination to come to grips with his books. Problem: I find Richler's heroes among the most dislikeable in fiction; further, I have great difficulty telling them apart. They all start out as Little Victims, both of poverty and anti-Semitism, but next thing you know, they're rich, successful, and admired, with no really clear explanation of how they got from Fletcher's Field High to top-level journalism, television writing, or whatever. Joshua seems to have made it by plagiarism: "Ripping a short story with a twist in its tail from *Collier's*, he rewrote it, setting it in Calgary...." Both Joshua and Jake marry beautiful *shiksas*, whom they chronically suspect of infidelity, and of whom they are insanely jealous. Joshua cheerfully cuckolds his friends, but the idea of the same thing happening to him is abominable, unspeakable, treasonous. Apart from their utterly desirable wives, however, they seem to hate women, and often treat them viciously.

Old Lady Dry Cunt is Joshua's name for his neighbour in London, and he sprays her newly planted rhododendrons with "murdering lime solution." She earned this by complaining about the noise his children made. The reader's sympathy is immediately with the neighbour, for having to live next to Joshua and his kids.

In the bright lexicon of Richler masterpieces, all women are cunts, and all men are pricks. And Richler's characters believe that women love being mauled:

His mouth full, squirting pickle juice, he ran his hand up the legs of mountainous waitresses in delicatessens, making them quake with laughter and feel good....For fifty dollars a year, he was able to call a toll-free station and was given the numbers of ladies eager to receive obscene phone calls. He no sooner unfastened his seat belt on the Eastern flight to New York than he was...whispering indecencies into the stewardess's ear, making her flush with pleasure.

Richler's men clearly believe that women simply adore such treatment; if they ever check the women's opinions, they might learn that it's not with pleasure that the stewardess is flushing.

One of the real nastinesses in *Joshua Then and Now* is the account of Joshua's bar mitzvah, for which his mother does a strip-tease to entertain his friends. I gather that this is supposed to be wildly funny. It struck me as ugly and cruel. No

mother, be she ever so stupid or depraved, would do that to her son, and it is a libel on all mothers.

Richler characters never invite people to meet them for a drink: they tell them to get their ass over there. Ad nauseam. Is it supposed to be funny, or is it "authentic" dialogue? All the dialogue is decorated with "fuck," "shit," "turd," "ass-hole," and so on. "What are you doing?" Jake asks when Duddy Kravitz phones him, and Duddy replies, "Masturbating."

Jokes of extraordinary crudeness and unfunniness are carefully recounted. Jake condemns them as puerile, but we get them anyway. Duddy's arrival in London produces new peaks in nastiness. It's during the first phase of the mini-skirt.

All that quim out taking the air in those short skirts. I tell you, Yankel, if one of those chicks had a Tampax inside, you'd see the string dangling.... Walking down the street here, if you swung your arm like a hook... you could lick hot pussy off your hand for hours.

And so on for several pages. The later hooks are worse than the early ones. Critics describe them as rich, tragic, brilliant, and sad. Inventive and outrageously funny.

Is this stuff really funny? Not pathetic? Still, except for occasional gropings and grabbings, we don't get the detailed accounts of sexual activity so conscientiously offered by women writers, but the dirty language and the preoccupation with excrement and loveless copulation is there in dreary abundance. Surely it's old hat? The real writers, not those motivated by the chip on the shoulder, have moved beyond this sludge.

If men have abandoned it, why are women writers still working so hard at producing the same grungy stuff? For most of my life, women have struggled to rid the world of it. I found their preoccupation with it inexplicable until I heard a CBC broadcast in which some women publishers explained what they were up to. It seems that feminists are claiming the right for women to produce their own erotic writing, in a crusade to encourage its production by women, for women. This market has hitherto been dominated by males, but the ladies want to explore it, and this has lent respectability to the genre; it is now found on the same bookstore tables as top-selling political or biographical books.

Oh, hooray. Such liberation.

If there's one thing the world can easily do without, it's more of the kind of slurb produced by Richler and his female counterparts. Our best male writers have abandoned this gunk, dear sisters. It's not funny, it's not stimulating; it's monotonous and depressing. Strip-teases, whether male or female, are dismal and disheartening. The fact that some people need or want them is a sad reflection on our society; books and films that cater to such poverty of spirit can be dispensed with. No sacrifice at all. ♦

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A Voice You Can Trust

by CAROLE GIANGRANDE



Linda Spalding

THE PAPER WIFE

by Linda Spalding
Knopf, 238 pages, \$25 cloth
(ISBN 0 394 28027 X)

MAYBE it's a comment on the confusing state of the world that Linda Spalding's novel comes as such a surprise. *The Paper Wife* is simply (or maybe not so simply) a story full of intriguing characters who take us on a journey of revelation, who evoke a

now distant time (the mid-1960s) and the strangeness of an unfamiliar country (Mexico). Or perhaps it's just unsettling for this reviewer to realize that she's learned to read like a paranoid sentry on full alert, always ready to have her trust in narrative or in language blown apart by some postmodern trick.

Yet to read this novel is to be disarmed. Spalding writes with a voice

you can trust. There are no gimmicks; occasional shifts in point of view only serve to cast different sorts of light, illuminating the shadowy corners of this tale. It's the rediscovery of what we used to take for granted as readers, the pleasure of letting down our guard, of letting the writer draw us into a story.

The Paper Wife is a compelling tale that sneaks up on the reader. In the mid-'60s, Lily, the central character, is on her way to Mexico, alone and pregnant. On the bus, she recalls the death of her mother and her dad's leaving her with her grandmother, whose Colorado home was a basement, the only part of the house that her own late husband had managed to construct. And although Lily's life is built on such rickety foundations, she finds friendship with Kate, who's well-to-do, and (from a reader's point of view) more elusive.

In university, a young man named Turner enters their lives. Lily likes him, but he falls in love with Kate. Turner is aimless in '60s fashion, and from our vantage point, it's hard to know what makes this man appealing. It's also frustrating at first that Lily's feelings about her friendship with Kate elude us. Yet to Spalding's credit, this is no predictable tale of jealousy between women. Lily is resourceful; she's fond of Kate and hasn't a scrap of self-pity. Yet she's also young and human, and we watch as she cobbles together a life for herself from the scraps of her friends' lives, as if she were completing the half-finished house of her childhood. When Turner comes back from a bout of drifting, he's angry and convinced that Kate's been cheating on him. Lily gets drunk and slips into his bed. It's Turner's child she's carrying inside her on the bus to Mexico.

Lily has been given an American contact at an orphanage where she'll place the child for adoption and teach hard-to-place kids while waiting to give

birth. There's something suspect about this arrangement; we sense it, then know it when Turner comes to Mexico to find Lily, at the cost of getting himself caught in the baby-selling racket. Turner and Lily find themselves sleeping together, but Turner doesn't want her child, and Lily knows he won't stay with her unless she gets rid of it. Worse, he's agreed to deliver one of Lily's charges (Alexander, a child who refuses to speak) to Texas, to what he suspects is a child-prostitution ring. Much happens very quickly, but the fast pace of the story nicely matches the quiet eloquence of the writing.

Turner can only get across the US border without suspicion if he pretends the child is adopted and that Lily (or someone else) is his wife. Here the reader wonders why Turner allowed himself to get into this big a mess, although it's consistent with the wavering character of a man who can't seem to tell one woman from another in bed. (He's also short of cash.) The ruse at the border fails and they're stuck inside Mexico with young Alexander. At this point, unsuspecting Kate comes chasing after Turner, waving his draft notice, telling him he's in deep trouble, a crisis that can be remedied if he marries her. But it's not just the US government on Turner's trail. His child-smuggling contact in Mexico is armed and waiting. And there's the small matter of his bed-mates, best friends Lily and Kate. It's left to Lily to slice through the Gordian knot, rescuing a man who may not deserve it.

All of this might strain credibility in the hands of a less gifted writer. Yet Spalding not only makes this fracas believable, she takes risks to pull it off. She weaves religious subtext into the story, in ways that give it great resonance and power. Mexico's rich blend of Native and Christian iconography is stitched into the language of her novel, echoing the storytelling

needlework that Lily's grandmother stitches into her altar cloths. There's no doubt that any story that ends the day before Easter runs the risk of being heavy-handed. Yet here it works, lending weight to an ending that does the classic turn and restores the wholeness that human beings disturb and break.

Lily symbolically puts right all she feels she has harmed and destroyed, and in doing this, she also reclaims in metaphor the losses she has suffered. *The Paper Wife* is a haunting and eloquent novel, one with a sense of completeness that makes reading it a pleasure.

SEXUAL STRATEGIES

by Margaret Sweatman

VILLAINELLE

by Lynn Crosbie
Coach House. 62 pages. \$12.95 paper
(ISBN 0 88910 470 0)

IN THE HOUSE OF SLAVES

by Evelyn Lau
Coach House. 64 pages. \$13 paper
(ISBN 0 88910 468 9)

LYNN CROSBIE is a writer of intelligence, humour, and vitality, qualities that have made reviewing her work an odd experience. I have a difficult time focusing on the poems in *Villainelle*; my mind wanders. The poems are allusive, drawing from classical and popular culture, comic books and myth mixed. They are dramatic monologues by a seemingly racy narrator, an apparently dangerous vamp in various guises. The allusions are analogous to the digressions of narrative, and they are unsatisfying as such: the merging of voices distracts from the poems' drive; they are ornate in nature, like tendrils on a mannequin. This is from the title poem:



Lynn Crosbie



Evelyn Lau

empêchement, déplaisir, une lettre,
une brune, la mort. she says she
wishes she was a magician; she would
get me out of here. keys sewed in her
palms. she would pull silver from my
ears, my mouth. she is my last chance,
I asked her to help me. I need to
change
before I fall. I have killed seven men.
each time, I flagged them down and
I put them
out of their misery. I would stand by
the
topless bar, by the highway and smile
and say,
hello handsome. hello baby, could I
get
a lift? and kiss them. empty their
pockets
and strip off their clothes. take it all
off.
I said, and shot them dead. Arlene.
I wrote,
you are way too kind / to get to
know my kind
of mind. but if you listen, I will tell
you
where it ended and I began

The first person dominates, and it became very loud in my ear after I had read this book a few times. There is something strangely co-opted in the sexual strategies of revenge. The "I" is wearing stiletto heels, and yes, this is a parodic costume, the "tiger-skin / bustier," the "edible underpants," and so on, the Gothic costumes. The rules of the game, however, remain unchanged. The "I" is armed, but the sexual dance is still cynical, manipulative, and autoerotic. The other, the victim of love, is a joke, protected from real harm by the comic space of hyperbole and extravagant diction. And the performance of the vengeful femme exists in poems of rather relentless syntax dominated by a naughty narrator. The subject, the "I," is as fixed and pathological as a hero:

*I see him through a keyhole,
swaying below the porchlight and his
halo of moths,
I smell the wine on his breath and I
feel
weak in the knees: this is my blood.
I release the chain and fall into his
arms,
again. his cheeks are comely with
rows of
jewels, his neck with chains of
gold.
he wears an iron cross, confederate
bandanna and his chain-whips
clamour,
they sting my fingers when I undress
him.
("Jesus the Low Rider")*

The intelligence of this writer kept me going back again and again to *Villainelle*, thinking I'd simply been irritable prior to reading it. But I come away irritated every time. It is sexy blasphemy, but I can't get any purchase on the performance or the politics. I just slide off these poems and feel rather cheated. They are brilliant, they shine — but maybe they simply

lack the problematic resonance of compassion.

Evelyn Lau, on the other hand, contrives a collision of the fragile with the brutal. *In the House of Slaves* is divided in half. Part one is about sadomasochistic sexuality, a numb eroticism of pain:

*You on a bed the colour of stone. blue
grey. mottled. myself in the
mirror pale as rice paper against the
northern brick wall. The smell
of burning hair fighting the mist of
flowers as I draw lit matches
along the points of hair on your body
and you lie still as ice over
water. Biting into the pillow with the
tips of ten fingers. your eyes
bend like the surface of an ocean
ruffled by wind. your body
stretches across quilted stone. Tell me
the princess story, you say.
tell me again about being a beautiful
princess in a faraway land,
where I am a penniless wanderer
locked in your dungeon, forced to
breed a race of slaves for your
amusement...and I tell you the
story
while a skein of storm clouds races
highspeed across your eyes like
some dream sequence in a movie. I
tell you I am a princess of silk....
("On a Bed the Colour of Stone")*

This is what I admire about these poems, the construction of a binary that is graceful and, in this poem at least, erotic. The sexuality is based on the temporary and artificial exchange of power: the female becomes, in the bedroom and for a while, the antagonist. And her usurpation is carefully framed by the real relation:

*...Days of rain that keep Japanese
investors away from
the golf courses so that you can leave
work early, idling your
gunmetal car outside the lobby....
...Afterwards it is you who dresses*

*proudly, in the ebony
room smelling of orange brandy and
freesias. It is you who turns the
keys in all the locks when we leave.
footsteps sounding under an
enraged sky. past a dozen boxes of
twisting stunted trees*

My respect for the poems in this first section has grown with rereading. I was at first resistant to the obvious necessity of a liberal reaction. The sexuality is desensitized, the pain anaesthetized by dope or by the male's overloaded neurosystem, the complications of money, power, deceit, alienation, and narcissism, which make access to pain the only point of intimacy with a woman. And, very strangely, the narrator is always given the position of master. Yes, this is temporized by the ersatz economy of prostitution. But the narrator is never seen to digest the pain; it is all on the surface (as in Crosbie's work, the surface is a burnished mirror where Gothic fantasies play the game of revenge). I don't understand why Lau writes herself into pornography. And I don't see any preoccupation with that problem in these poems. They are salacious confessions. And I feel that my role as reader is to be numb to my own disgust or unease: I mustn't be prudish. But I would like to be engaged on levels other than the surface, as lovely and edgy as that surface is.

The book's second section is equally preoccupied with male power, though the material is more tame. It's very odd: the extremity of part one, the drug use, sadism, humiliation, the unease of the female's synthetic power, is followed in part two by confessions of an adulterous affair. And yet I feel as if the narrator is perhaps more pained and bewildered by the comparatively tame cruelty of the lover's deceit:

*I, a girl buttoned in black, supported
on chunky heels.
with a face like a purse: the eyes open
clasps.*

the cheeks willing to yield to the stuffing of a tongue and more. You looked at me as if to hold me down.

Instead you moved to the column of the fridge, bustled your fingers with a spiral staircasing of a corkscrew, stems of glasses blowing bubbles between your fingers, when your wife laughed and threw her finger into the air,

I saw she was thin as the membrane on the wings of some flying things, and I thought at any moment her silks would balloon, then she would drift high and hang with her spine along the ceiling, and see down, see things.

Again, Lau's feminine strophe is the delicate, and the male antistrophe haunts, antagonizes, abandons the feminine. And so Lau seems a writer whose work hasn't yielded to a differing synthesis, and the performance remains co-opted by the male gaze.

A GUIDE TO THE PERPLEXED

by Joel Yanofsky

GENDER WARS: A NOVEL AND SOME CONVERSATION ABOUT SEX AND GENDER

by Brian Fawcett

Somerville House, 272 pages, \$35 cloth, \$19.95 paper (ISBN 1 895897 09 2 cloth, 0 921051 94 8 paper)

NOWADAYS if you look up the word "dinosaur" in the dictionary, don't be surprised to see a picture of a white heterosexual male. Unable to adapt to life or women in the 1990s, the post-modern man is headed straight for the tar pit. But then this is hardly news;

nowadays, it's more like an article of faith, a tenet of dogma, money in the bank.

Nevertheless, there are signs of change — sometimes in the most unlikely places. On Frank Sinatra's new album *Duets*, for example, the Chairman of the Board alters the lyrics to his classic hit "The Lady Is a Tramp" and sings instead "The Lady Is a Champ." The message is indisputable: if Sinatra can be sensitized, anyone can.

(What's next:

Arnold

Schwarzenegger

weeping openly in *Terminator 3*?)

Maybe, I remember thinking, there's hope for my beleaguered gender after all.

Then I read Brian Fawcett's new novel and I had to think again. Which is exactly what Fawcett wants — to make his readers rethink their outdated notions about everything from desire to rape. In *Gender Wars*, Fawcett embraces and exposes the male dinosaur in all its hoary and horny forms; he also turns what heterosexual males have always secretly known to be true — that we're "almost as bad as heterosexual women say we are" — into both a personal confession and a rallying cry.

If this book isn't exactly a guide to the sensitive new man, it is a guide to the perplexed new man. There is advice on all the things you've either been too prudish or too well brought up to ask about: like the importance of cunnilingus (*really* important) and the



Brian Fawcett

trust required to practice heterosexual anal intercourse (a lot). Fawcett also has provocative opinions on reducing testosterone levels, not taking erections so seriously, masturbation as a symptom of loneliness, pornography, the patriarchy, the matriarchy, group sex, and the fact that a substantial increase in female satisfaction just might save the world, not to mention reduce the deficit: "If the total number of female orgasms on the planet could be doubled or tripled," Fawcett speculates, "sensible economic and political activities would flourish."

While I probably should admit right now that *Gender Wars* never really works as a novel, Fawcett's alternately insightful and outrageous opinions generally make for fascinating reading. That's because I was never entirely sure, from start to finish, when or if he was kidding.

But then, ambivalence is built into

the content and the structure of *Gender Wars* — the half of the book that can be loosely described as fiction is printed in black ink; the rest is commentary, printed in red ink — and for having done that Fawcett deserves considerable credit. These days we are deathly afraid of holding two contradictory opinions, or feeling two different emotions at once, which makes you wonder when doubt became such an unforgivable human quality. Ambivalence, as Fawcett wisely reminds us, “demands circumspection and patience, both of which this world badly needs — more than it needs brainlessly erect penises.”

No one, incidentally, is more mixed up than Ferris, the main character in this two-track tract about gender and sexuality. Ferris comes to a lot of conclusions about himself and the women in his life, but perhaps none more revealing than this one:

The only incontrovertible wisdom he could deduce from last night was that the world is full of jerks, and that he was indisputably one of them. He already knew that. No, that wasn't good enough. He'd spent most of his adult life comforting himself that he wasn't the worst jerk around. Now, suddenly, he wanted to ask himself just exactly how big a jerk he was, and whether it was necessary to remain one all his life.

There is an alternative to remaining a jerk all your life, as Fawcett points out in fire-engine-red ink: you can grow up. Unfortunately, growing up in a novel requires narrative momentum and character development, and there's really no point mentioning such things in regard to this book. The same applies to plot and story. *Gender Wars* is a novel only because its author and publisher insist on calling it that.

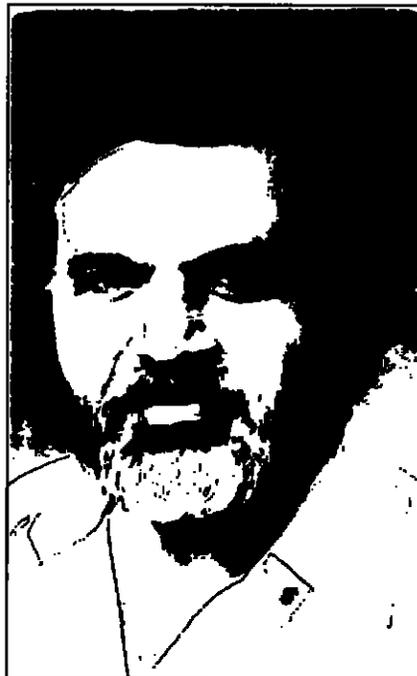
The question I still have a hard time

answering is why they bothered. As it is, the fictionalized half of *Gender Wars* reads as much like a lecture as the half that is unapologetically a lecture. Take the character of Ferris's wife, Annie, for example. Introduced in the first chapter as crucial to the story, she has virtually disappeared by the second chapter. Meanwhile, other important characters aren't parachuted in until the book is more than half over. None of this concerns Fawcett; he even says so, acknowledging at the end of the book that his problems with character, event, and composition are “frankly unimportant.” He's heavy-handed and, what's more, proud of it.

Maybe I'm just a literary dinosaur, maybe my testosterone level needs to be reduced, but books like this — check that, there *are* no other books like this — make me want to punch someone. Again, that's undoubtedly one of Fawcett's reasons for writing the way he does. He has mixed up fiction and non-fiction before, specifically in his previous novel, *Public Eye*, and in this latest book he states his intention clearly in the subtitle, *A Novel with Some Conversation about Sex and Gender*. The implication of doing this is also clear: Fawcett doesn't believe novels can get the job done any more. They can't instruct us the way he thinks we should be instructed; they can't grab and shake us the way he thinks we should be grabbed and shaken.

I couldn't disagree more. Making sense of complex, everyday subjects like gender or sex are what the novel, old-fashioned as it may seem in our postmodern times, does best. I've learned more about how difficult it is for men and women to get along from Wallace Stegner's *Angle of Repose*, for instance, than I'll ever learn reading all the psychological treatises and self-help manuals ever published. Of course, Fawcett is entitled to his loss of

faith in the novel. He's also entitled to turn that loss of faith into a fictional technique. The lingering question is, why bother? If the novel ain't broke, at least not yet, why does Fawcett insist on fixing it?



M. G. Vassanji

SOMETHING LIKE THE TRUTH

by Allan Casey

THE BOOK OF SECRETS: A NOVEL

by M. G. Vassanji
McClelland & Stewart, 324 pages, \$18.99 paper
(ISBN 0 7710 8719 5)

IN ONE very obvious sense, M. G. Vassanji's latest novel is all about appropriation of voice. The book doesn't resolve that contentious issue, and to read the narrative as an academic treatise is to overlook a story that is moving in a refined, elliptical, soft-spoken way. *The Book of Secrets* is also exotic, and by that I don't mean exotic just for Canadians of European descent; set against a tide of political

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Founded and edited by Gordon Lish and now published by Sam Hiyate and Gutter Press, *The Quarterly* is constituted of prose fiction and poetry robust in the character of its idiosyncrasy. Ranked as one of the top five literary magazines by the *New York Times Book Review*, *The Quarterly* is known for its accessibility to all comers. Newly reborn, *The Quarterly* fully intends to regain its reputation as an outlaw periodical that careens with quirkiness, energy, outrage, surprise and force. To keep its activity free of pre-

The Quarterly No. 26 Edited by Gordon Lish

dictability, *The Quarterly* runs novel-length fictions as well as fictions that consist in the compression of only a handful of concise sentences; poetry that refutes the poetical; compositional speculations that invert the very idea of the literary; oddments of often unclassifiable stripe; wildly eccentric visual art. Given the controversy of its effects, *The Quarterly* is widely taken to be the most exceptional occasion for the reader to come into lively contact with tomorrow's writing today.

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Elizabeth Renzetti
The Globe and Mail

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Michael Coren
Luc Times

Boy's Night Out

by James R. Wallen

change, depicting a web of ethnicities and cultures, and juggling a large cast of characters, this relatively short novel aspires to rather epic proportions. The story opens a year before the First World War, and the subsequent fall of colonialism serves as a backdrop for the story.

Vassanji was born in Kenya and raised in Tanzania, and he chooses the borderland between the two countries — the vicinity of Mount Kilimanjaro, which is lovingly rendered here as a kind of Eden — as his setting. To be more precise, the story *straddles* the border that now separates Kenya from Tanzania, but in colonial times divided British East Africa from German East Africa. The former was the land of rupees, the Union Jack, and cricket; the latter of *hellers* and superior marching bands. For the Africans and the Arab and Indian traders, such distinc-

tions between their European overlords were mostly irrelevant, until war broke out. The seeds of the story are planted in this turbulent time, when local people might be hanged or conscripted into espionage service by either side in the conflict, are trusted by neither side, and want only to be left alone by both.

The narrative proper begins as one Alfred Corbin, a kindly, stodgy young diplomat, arrives in British East Africa to take up his first post in the foreign service. His stint in the middle-of-nowhere town of Kikono is mostly unremarkable, except for a strange triangular relationship that ensnares him and the newlyweds Mariamu, the wild and mystic niece of the village headman, and Pipa, a refugee from German East Africa who is caught behind the border by war.

When Pipa and Mariamu marry, the groom has nagging doubts about the

purity of his bride, and their first born has alarmingly fair skin and light eyes. However, Corbin soon moves on to another post, the war overtakes all of them, and a diary that Mariamu purloins from the British mystery man is the only thing that still connects her to him. The action soon moves on to Dar es Salaam, where members of the ever more prosperous community of Shamsi Muslims have gravitated from poor Kikono. After Mariamu's untimely death, Pipa comes into possession of the diary and, shrewd but illiterate, spends his life trying to solve the riddle it holds, and why his wife stole it in the first place.

Our narrator, like many other characters in the book, is a foreigner, a Goan Catholic called Pius who comes to Dar to teach history to the best and brightest of Shamsi society. Unceremoniously dumped from his position

by the new, post-colonial government of Tanzania, he takes his own stab at explicating the diary, which chance has delivered to him. The researches of this Conradian narrator comprise the bulk of *The Book of Secrets*; in the diary (itself a book of secrets), Pius finds not only connections to his own somewhat un-lived life, but in some respects a history of an entire country.

Playing on a belief — common in colonized countries — that the foreign overlords stole the souls of those whose lives they so meticulously recorded and quantified in their books and ledgers, Vassanji deftly explores the relationship between history and myth, and who may write them. Ultimately, it is the reader whom Vassanji invests with the responsibility of deciding whose story is told by the diary, and he demands a certain amount of diligence. For example, he refers to political events and the specifics of geography in the story in a kind of shorthand that may send the less informed hunting for an atlas or history book. And yet, Vassanji seems to be saying, isn't *The Book of Secrets* itself a history? Or does it merely prove a sordid patri-mony? Since the diary is written by an Englishman, can it say anything meaningful of Africa? Do we need the Indian from Goa to interpret the English for us?

In the end, Vassanji's narrator unapologetically states a caveat that applies to all books, including, of course, *The Book of Secrets*:

...[it is] incomplete as any book must be. A book of half lives, partial truths, conjecture, interpretation, and perhaps even some mistakes. What better homage to the past than to acknowledge it thus....



ON THE TRAIL OF CORRUPTION

by Clive Cocking

ABOVE THE LAW: THE CROOKS, THE POLITICIANS, THE MOUNTIES, AND ROD STAMLER

by Paul Palango

McClelland & Stewart, 520 pages, \$29.99 cloth
(ISBN 0 7710 6929 4)



Paul Palango

CANADIANS are often chided for being cynical about their politicians — usually by some eminence in the political or business elite. That fact resonates with significance after reading Paul Palango's revealing book on the career of Rod Stamler. *Above the Law* is the story of a top Mountie's dogged pursuit of the corrupt dealings of businessmen on the make and politicians on the take. Palango, former national editor of the *Globe and Mail*, provides an inside look at the saga of sleaze of recent years. It makes our cynicism seem more like realism.

Part exposé, part biography, *Above the Law* recounts how Rod Stamler

rose from low-level bookkeeper to become the RCMP's ace investigator of crime among the upper crust. An avid pilot, he was drawn to the force by the lure of piloting an RCMP Beaver, but early success in handling a politically sensitive case while on traffic patrol in Ottawa put Stamler on an earthbound fast track. Selected in 1968 for the newly formed Commercial Crime Branch, Stamler (who later became head of the branch)

spent much of his career probing a twilight zone of fraud, stock manipulation, bid-rigging, bribery, and influence-peddling that reached into the highest levels of politics.

Aside from involvement in one elaborate stock scam, the mob scarcely figures here. Stamler early discovered — in a 1970 investigation of bid-rigging for federal contracts in the ship salvage business — that the Mafia were pickers compared to the organized crimes of supposedly respectable citizens. The political mus-

cle of the well-connected also often made them tough to beat: in this case, the Nova Scotia attorney-general declined to prosecute for fear of embarrassing the Halifax elite.

All sorts of prominent little piggies come snuffling through these pages, looking to jam their noses into the political trough. John Munro, Richard Hatfield, John Doyle, Bryce Mackasey, Walter Wolfe, Roch LaSalle, and many others all emerge less than squeaky clean. The book reveals much about deviousness in high places, as Stamler and his team unravel some of the biggest scandals of the period, such as "Harbourgate," the massive dredg-



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ing contract kickback scheme involving harbour commissioners in Hamilton, Ontario. That ended in a successful prosecution, but it was rougher going when operations moved into more sensitive territory: the Ottawa-Quebec nexus.

Stamler came up against Quebec political hardball in trying to nail Senator Louis Giguère (the top Liberal fund-raiser in Quebec) and several other businessmen on conspiracy, bribery, and theft charges for their roles in gaining a federal extension on the Sky Shops Montreal airport lease. Quebec justice officials, "acting under instructions from a superior," stonewalled, threatened, prevaricated; and ultimately only the small fry were convicted, while Giguère walked.

Stamler faced an equally rough replay in 1988 in investigating payoffs to Senator Michel Cogger — a close friend of Brian Mulroney, who was prime minister at the time — for lob-

bing the federal government for Quebec businesses. The low point came when a mysterious telex, which a senior officer denied ever signing, ordered Stamler to cease the investigation, marking, says Palango, "the first time he had experienced interference within the force on a case." Cogger was eventually charged with influence-peddling, but after a "bizarre" trial last spring where the Quebec judge acknowledged a crime had been committed but found no evidence that Cogger "has a corrupt state of mind," he was acquitted.

What has clearly driven Stamler to speak out is his outraged discovery that, as Palango writes, "in Canada the rule of law did not supersede the rule of politics." Stamler contends that the independence of the justice system has been undermined and politicians now can, and do, exert improper control at the highest levels — including within the RCMP.

The low crimes and misdemeanours of the RCMP Security Service during the 1970s Quebec Crisis, which made the force seem "out of control," were used by the federal government to make the RCMP commissioner politically accountable, as a deputy minister reporting directly to the prime minister. Stamler condemns the two most recent commissioners — Robert Simmonds and the incumbent, Norman Inkster — for being too cosy with the government, surrendering legitimate independent authority, and improperly requiring detailed investigation reports to be submitted to political officials. The book documents situations where, in this process, leaks have occurred and investigations have been frustrated. Stamler scathingly attacks Inkster for obsequiously yielding to political pressure, citing his revelations to a parliamentary committee on RCMP probes of wrongdoing by MPs and his ordering of a judicial

inquiry into the Cogger investigation — while officers were still on the case — which effectively derailed the investigation.

In disgust, Stamler took early retirement in 1989 and joined a forensic accounting firm. He comes across as a good cop devoted to enforcing the law without fear or favour — which adds weight to his serious charge that our justice system is bent. "It is," he says, "a system of justice designed at its heart to protect the political and economic elite from police investigations and prosecutions."

Even the most jaded reader will find alarming material here. And while certain sections raise questions or need more corroboration (by independent legal authorities), this book presents a *prima facie* case justifying concern. The charges made in *Above the Law* deserve serious attention, debate, and action. It's not good enough to shrug it all off with a cynical "I told you so."

MEMORY'S FIERY CIRCLE

by Mary Dalton

BLASPHEMER'S WHEEL: SELECTED AND NEW POEMS 1980-1994

by Patrick Friesen
Turnstone, 128 pages, \$12.95 paper
(ISBN 0 88901 179 2)

IT MUST BE the power of the title: *Blasphemer's Wheel*. I'm filled with the urge to speak blasphemies against contemporary criticism-religion. Great: Patrick Friesen is a great artist. Comparisons with artists not carrying Canadian passports: Pascal, Donne, Hopkins, Lawrence, Beckett, Van Gogh. When the dust settles, when our jawbones and our theories quieten to dust, Patrick Friesen's singing,



Patrick Friesen

his own cross of psalms and wailing saxophone, will be sounding clear and strong.

The publication of *Blasphemer's Wheel: Selected and New Poems 1980-1994* is an important event. It contains brief selections from *the lands i am*, *bluebottle*, and *The Shunning*, the powerful sequence about a Mennonite outcast, as well as generous selections from the more recent *Unearthly Horses*, *Flicker and Hawk*, and *You Don't Get To Be a Saint*. There are 22 new poems, brief lyrics preoccupied with the anguish of absence, of lost love.

In his poems Friesen explores the regions of psyche and landscape that Kurelek has rendered in paint. Terror of the void, an immense loneliness and longing, an urgent need to fuse with the Other (the woman, the Muse, an absent and impossible God), all manifest themselves in the work. These are the cravings of a century. What distinguishes Friesen, in part, is his embodiment of these cravings, forever gnawing at the heart, forever denied any but fleeting fulfilment, in the stretches and creatures of the Prairie, in the vast dome of Prairie sky. For Friesen spirit is earth, earthy: horses are muscled beasts and avatars of a Zen nothingness. Earth blazes out

in "cattle lurching front legs in water" or in "a blackbird with a sun for its head." Earth and sky are at once in the body, of the body, and an opening void. Friesen knows "the hole a sky can be"; for him eyes are blue "as if the sky bled them."

In sections from *The Shunning* and in the eight "pa poems" from *Unearthly Horses* Friesen travels zones of pain — those of the outcast son, of the loving mother, of generations, each of which needs to forgive the one before "the crucifixion then and today." Memory is a turning in circles, an agonizing wheeling, always with a consciousness of betrayal. We are all Ixions on time's fiery wheel. Memory is shifting, constructed, ravaging, and poems are a way of "[hal- lowing] this dying."

The poems selected from *Flicker and Hawk* and *You Don't Get To Be a Saint* record the quest for the elusive woman (lover, *anima*, Muse) and all the conflict and turbulence of that quest. As with the poems about farm or landscape, these selections, while charged with a sense of the metaphysical, are grounded in the everyday, in a domestic tenderness for wife, son, and daughter. Like Akhmatova and Giacometti, whose work he honours in the two long "anna" poems, Friesen is ever aware of "the flesh and the spirit / the red heart and the blue wind."

In *Blasphemer's Wheel* he "[hallows] the hollow" of land and sky, of body and psyche. While I regret the absence of some poems in *Flicker and Hawk* (especially "water burial" and "leaving home"), I can see the principle of unity in this collection: the tortures and torments — and ecstasies — of loving.

The group of new poems that closes the book enters a kind of psychic circle of hell. Some of these attain the resonant intensity of the rest of the book, most notably "shh (the window)," "gathering bones," "blasphemous

wheel," and "absence of angels." But the dominant impression is of unmediated pain, of "a man drowning in the maelstrom of his heart." In his best writing Patrick Friesen transforms that maelstrom into great art. I cherish this book for its gathering of some of that best, and I look forward with hope to the next one.

THE VIOLENCE AND THE BEAUTY

by Clint Burnham

A DISCOVERY OF STRANGERS

by Rudy Wiebe

Knopf, 296 pages, \$27 cloth
(ISBN 0 394 28050 4)



Rudy Wiebe

THE VERY FIRST writer I ever met was the grandmother of my best friend, Joe Goudie. This was in Goose Bay, Labrador. It was the mid-'70s, and Elizabeth Goudie came to our elementary school to talk about her book, *Woman of Labrador*. Goudie had hunted and trapped for over 50 years in the beautiful, unforgiving wilderness. She was a quiet, humble

woman with awesome presence and authority. The next town over from our school was Happy Valley, so-called because, as legend went, American servicemen would visit Native women there during the Second World War.

This all came back to me in a rush as I read Rudy Wiebe's new novel, *A Discovery of Strangers*: colonialism, the cold of the North, the violence and beauty hopelessly ensnared in the miscegenation that lies in our country's origin — what Terry Goldie calls "fear and temptation" in his book of the same name. Canada has still not come to terms with the sexual component all too easily forgotten in accounts of Native-white relations. "Contact" indeed.

This great theme has been Wiebe's concern since his two wonderful novels of the 1970s, *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *The Scorched-Wood People*. In those books, characters such as Gabriel Dumont and Big Bear emerged as almost Christ-like figures around whom tempests of narrative and historical action swirled in hectic and tragic grandeur. What is remarkable about Wiebe's achievement in these two novels — and now, in *A Discovery of Strangers* — is that he is able to be, it seems, both Faulkner and Balzac at once. That is, Wiebe can construct scenes of painstaking detail and psychological insight, and combine them or frame them in exciting historical situations.

A Discovery of Strangers deals with the Dene nation of the Tetsor'ine, specifically with a small group "led," after a fashion, by Keskarrah, a mystic. He and his family, including the bewitching Greenstockings, become embroiled in aiding the Franklin expedition in northern Canada in 1820–21. Robert Hood, a Royal Navy midshipman and artist, falls in love with Greenstockings, but does not do anything more than impreg-

1994 Governor General's Literary Awards

The Canada Council is asking all publishers of first-edition trade books written, translated or illustrated by Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada to submit titles published since 1 September 1993 to the Canada Council for consideration for the 1994 Governor General's Literary Awards. In the translation category, the original work must also be a Canadian authored title.

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◇ The Governor General's Literary Awards, valued at \$10,000 each, are given annually to the best English-language and the best French-language work in each of the seven categories of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, children's literature (text), children's literature (illustration), and translation.



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FALL 1994 TITLES

FRANKIE ZAPPER AND THE DISAPPEARING TEACHER

story by **LINDA ROGERS**
illustrated by **RICK VAN KRUGEL**



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nate her. The expedition, which is attempting to establish a route to the Arctic Ocean, relies unthinkingly on the charity of the Dene people.

A Discovery of Strangers is accomplished in both technical and thematic terms. From the very beginning of the book, which is written from the perspective of animals in the North, the environment as a whole is treated as a character. Europeans need too many things, make loud noises, and tread heavily on the earth:

That was what Keskarrah hated before he ever met any Whites: guns. Trader guns needed endless, slow work, and yet were never as accurate as a quick arrow. And they screamed, "Listen: I'M HERE!" for unbelievable distances in all directions.

Wiebe's style is flamboyant, especially in description. I still remember the scene from *The Temptations of Big Bear* in which Big Bear cuts open a dying buffalo to enjoy the hither gall. Some of this exaggerated humour may come from, well, history. I was looking at one of Wiebe's sources, a book written by John Franklin more than 150 years ago, and he described a starvation trek where some of the men followed a wolverine's tracks in order to gnaw marrow out of the spinal cord of a year-old corpse. In *A Discovery of Strangers*, the corresponding scene is a description of a Dene haggis that Greenstockings prepares for Hood:

And I will sing this song too. For you, I took this stomach out of the animal; and poured in its blood and chewed small pieces of ribs and fat, chewed them soft mouthful by mouthful until there was enough to fill you, and spit them into the stomach until it was full, here it is, cooked and smoked too, full and waiting to be eaten....

This is all done without forgetting the linguistic component of the novel. The first section of *A Discovery of Strangers* is called "The Animals in This Country," words that, along with the book's title, suggest Margaret Atwood, Robert Kroetsch, and hpNichol. Wiebe mixes up the narratives as well, including actual journal entries from party members such as John Richardson, a medical doctor. These varying styles accomplish two tricks at once: the shifts make the narrative exciting and unpredictable, while at the same time they deconstruct fictive truth. *A Discovery of Strangers* is vintage Wiebe.

FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS

by Susan Hughes

TROUBLED SKIES: CRISIS, COMPETITION AND CONTROL IN CANADA'S AIRLINE INDUSTRY

by Susan Goldenberg
McGraw-Hill Ryerson 161 pages, \$22.95 cloth
(ISBN 0075516829)

ALTHOUGH she has written some notable business books, Susan Goldenberg's *Troubled Skies*, a history of Canada's aviation industry, is virtually unreadable, although meticulously researched. Part of the problem is that this type of chronological survey, heavily statistical in nature, requires stylishness of writing, and not just intelligent analysis. In the end, it's not a book for scholars, and it won't be a good read for the generalist either.

The book begins with a portrait of great expectations gone wrong, and a look at the perilous situation Canada's airline business is in today; a state far from the vision of its pioneers, who thought they were founding an industry that would thrive. Instead, it's come a cropper. The country's two

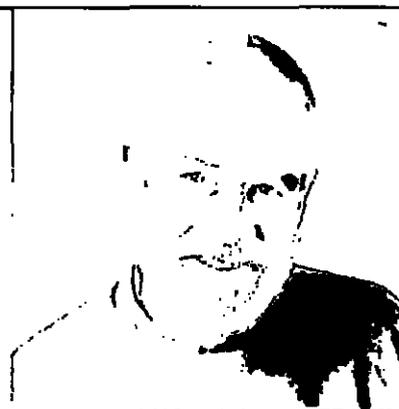
major carriers, for example, lost more money from 1990 to 1992 than they'd made in their entire histories.

Goldenberg starts off with the stories of several of the industry's ground-breakers; they were ex-pilots who returned from the First World War to establish such historic milestones as the first flight over the Rockies and Canada's first commercial flight. These bush pilots saw an opening and began to form their own airline companies, which were spurred on by the resource industry's need to get labour and equipment to hard-to-reach areas.

One would think that these pioneers, who flew planes with open cockpits and used skis as landing gear, must have been daring swashbucklers; yet Goldenberg doesn't succeed in bringing them alive, nor does she convey a sense of the romance of flying in the early decades of this century. After documenting these primitive beginnings, she goes on to describe the founding of what is now Air Canada and PWA; the politicization of the industry, especially during the C. D. Howe years; the Avro Arrow fiasco; the rise of entrepreneurs such as Max Ward; and, later, the privatization of Air Canada and the ensuing bitter rivalry between our two national airlines.

To Goldenberg's credit, she does supply an excellent chronology and charts in the appendix, and she rightly slams the recent tug of war between Air Canada and PWA for going "beyond normal competitive behaviour." She concludes that the "crisis must be resolved...the industry must learn from these painful years so that it never again plunges from high hopes to distress." This is pretty tame stuff, given the industry's colossal waste of taxpayers' money and the fact that it functioned effectively without government interference in the first place. Goldenberg also notes that the airlines are too insular in their think-

John Moss Enduring Dreams



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ing, but she doesn't point the way to any solutions other than the possibility of forming transnational strategic alliances, such as Qantas did with British Airways.

The real moral of this story is that the airline industry, like many others in Canada, has suffered from overly optimistic thinking during the last few decades. Most of our leaders, whether in government or the private sector, have failed to realize that there are limits to Canada's economy and wealth.



RAGE RULES

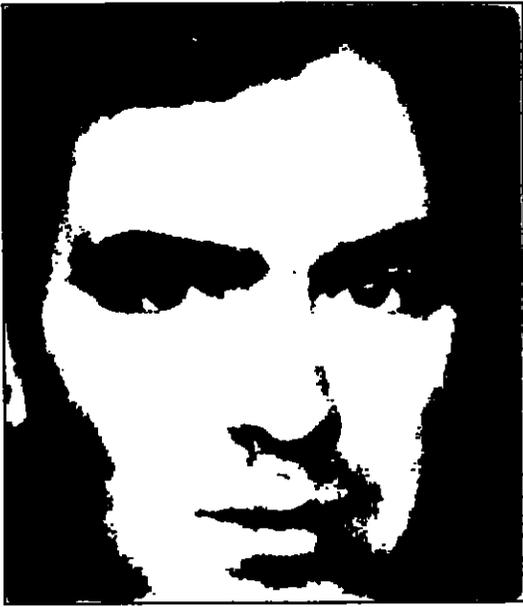
by Scott Ellis

THE HOLE THAT MUST BE FILLED

by Kenneth J. Harvey
Little Brown 237 pages \$24.95 cloth
(ISBN 0 316 34983 6)

IT'S A MISTAKEN faith that violent, stark things "beneath" civilization are more real, more primal than our everyday relations. Sociobiology gives ample evidence that culture, altruism, and play are genetically inborn, coexisting with darker urges. Knowing this, we should be sceptical of the usual valorization of grim stories in mundane settings as being somehow more honest than other fiction. Like romance or mystery, "dirty realism" is a genre.

The Hole That Must Be Filled is a



Kenneth J. Harvey

case in point; one could view these dark fables of violent rustics, anomie-gripped urbanites, and feral street kids as providing a decidedly cultivated *frisson* of mingled distance and familiarity, the reassurance of saying "I'm not like them" combined with the chilling realization that you may not be all that different.

Kenneth J. Harvey is at pains, though, to frustrate the voyeurism implicit in such a reading. His characters are seen close-up in their frailty, lurching rage, and pathos. In "Heber Peach," the confused teenager Darren sullenly cares for a senile father who doesn't remember him, but whom he can't bear to institutionalize. His one fulfilling relationship, if that's the phrase, is with an idolized heavy metal band. When Wer Leather Noose sends him a note with their latest song lyrics, "Fuck your parents, they are a curse, they raised you up, all for the worse," he has oracular sanction for patricide.

In this world love, when not frustrated, is only a passkey for betrayal and pain. Nothing is secure; Harvey's joyless middle-class characters are a bare inch from the poverty and chaos his drifters and dirt farmers never escape. The title story's married pro-

tagonist turns unhinged vagrant after his daughter's death on a family vacation.

Harvey has, in André Malraux's words, a "refusing spirit," repudiating life's comforts as inessential, false. In the line of the literature of denial, he lies somewhere between Samuel Beckett and Cormac McCarthy, the American novelist who recently won the National Book Award. Stylistically, his prose is closer to Beckett's minimalism, usually functional, sometimes exactly nuanced:

"I love you, Patsy," I whisper, quietly again, reaching out, but holding back, understanding that what I intend to do is not what I feel at all, but merely a bastard attempt at my body's own uneducated explanation.

But he sets much of his work in a Newfoundland as particular as McCarthy's American West, to the point of using phonetic dialect spellings. Occasionally it's too much: How does "stun'd" differ from "stunned"?

Harvey has McCarthy's propensity for mythic structure, which lends some stories resonance: in "Mime" a shift from everyday to apocalyptic magic realism feels unforced, right. It also leads him astray at times; the all-knowing, manipulative theatrical director in "The One" resembles one of Iris Murdoch's genteelly fascist *dei ex machina*, Unmoved Movers who teach everybody else what's what.

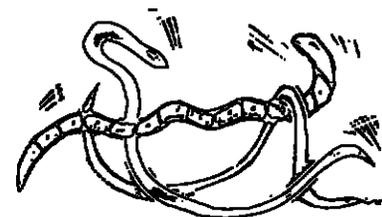
Enan, the director, is one of the few male characters who isn't utterly ruled by guilt, compulsion, and rage. Most are violent, bereft creatures, cut off from, when not overwhelmed by,

women and their own feelings. In his men Harvey shows one of his virtues: a cool moral nerve that lets him follow them through petty, twisted actions unflinchingly, without censure. In one of the few stories that ends on an up note, the unnamed narrator of "Break and Entry" stalks his estranged lover and spies on other women, yet manages to put aside anger and voyeurism, finding at least temporary happiness with someone whose picture he's stolen.

Collections often serve career aims better than they showcase individual stories. That's so in this case; set among other writers' work these stark pieces would stand out, evoking a Newfoundland so poor for so long that life, inner and outer, is all close to the bone. Here, the sheer accumulation of bleak detail, affective blankness, and spiritless rage gets numbing.

The best writers in this genre know that readers can absorb only so much unmediated misery, that amusement is integral to instruction. Beckett's work is rife with eerie slapstick. McCarthy delights and challenges with his densely textured prose. Harvey's style is sometimes well-honed, but usually just clean and unexceptional. No humour here, save a grim barroom joke with a corpse. This isn't even true to life; we know comedy springs from pain and loss. Codco's members don't just happen to be Newfoundlanders.

The Hole That Must Be Filled is a tough, well-imagined book, and its few missteps are those of a writer with a daring moral imagination. It would have been even more effective were it more fun to read.



PRECISION AND SURPRISE

by Brian Bartlett

MOOSEWOOD SANDHILLS

by Tim Lilburn
McClelland & Stewart, 68 pages, \$12.99 paper
(ISBN 0771053223)

DEMON POND

by Christopher Dewdney
McClelland & Stewart, 70 pages, \$12.99 paper
(ISBN 0771026935)

ity, if we closely follow its lines and absorb a comment in Lilburn's brief prefatory note: "Looking with care and desire seemed a political act."

Underlying this collection are a few key activities — waiting, digging, lying down, looking. One poem begins: "Lie on your belly now, stare, pour into the golden / eye of the grain and be counted." A significant oddity of this book is its emphasis on encountering natural phenomena by *lying down*, which in Lilburn's poems encourages kinds of receptivity and contact unlike those found through

that favourite, more familiar activity of nature poets, walking.

Ambitious yet suffused with humility, Lilburn's poetry spans extreme contrasts. Mourning and ecstasy. Probing, painstaking speech, and scepticism about "the glamour of clarity." The solitary in these poems hungers for under-

standing other creatures — even for achieving some sort of union, merging with "the sunward shoulder muscle / of the two-year-old doe" — yet he also acknowledges "a lit and horrible separateness."

More than most poets, Lilburn pushes his language far in two directions, the abstract and the sensuous. Unafraid of big statements like "All knowing darkens as it builds" or "Seeing is the extreme caring that comes when desire is broken," he usually avoids unearned loftiness. He reaches a balance by interweaving his abstractions with questioning tones, a few humorous asides ("what do I know; just a Baden-Powell Platonist,

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Christopher Dewdney



Tim Lilburn

WE SHOULD be grateful for a book of poems as fresh, unfashionable, and intense as *Moosewood Sandhills*. Grounded in a rough landscape along the South Saskatchewan River, Tim Lilburn's collection — despite mentions of Amway, sink parts, and a motorcycle — largely leaves behind cities and towns, friends and families, and the technological icons of our age. His poems reach us in the voice of someone living alone alongside aspens, deer, coyotes — and memories of reading religious contemplatives.

I'll go out on a limb here: *Moosewood Sandhills* is a wise book, far from escapist. It might help change the ways some of us relate to physical real-

jack-Catholic, / slo-pitch cognoscente"), and earthy imagery (a deer bed where "grass hums / because the body's touched it" and aspen leaves "below you sour like horses / after a run").

Among the greatest pleasures offered by *Moosewood Sandhills* are its sentences, pithy or expansive. One sort of sentence Lilburn likes is a long, sinuous one with many commas and adjectival additions: "I've found a radio station north of here in snow hills, lost, odd, paint strips / falling like dirty hair from the aluminum bubble, alone"; or "I will have been dreaming there of one day opening milky eyes and finding / myself sick, inside her body, high up, near the spine, poor, relieved." The constantly modifying, sometimes chantlike building-up of such syntax aptly suggests a hesitant but ongoing, resilient voice.

The language of *Moosewood Sandhills*

is exhilarating, charged sometimes with deliciously unexpected words — “fescue,” “weem,” “ordo,” “grama,” “penthos” — but more often with a creative play of adjectives: “planet-like names,” “magpies hairtriggered and thuggish,” “loyal-to-itself grass,” “moth-coloured trees,” “brain-calving grotto,” “somniaulant mud.”

Such surprises and precision are disturbingly rare in Christopher Dewdney's new collection, *Demon Pond*. This book will likely be called Dewdney's most accessible, but if the price of accessibility is the writing in much of this book, I'd welcome back the old elusiveness and density. Looser than Lilburn's, Dewdney's adjectives here risk dulling the senses and mind. “Ineffable,” “unfathomable,” “mysterious,” “remarkable,” “iridescent,” “luminescent,” “exquisite,” “perpetual,” “hallucinatory” — such words aren't new to Dewdney's vocabulary, but in the past they were scattered throughout inventive textures and fertile crossbreedings of diction.

Here, too many poems assert rather than evoke, declare rather than flesh out. Dewdney uses a word like “impossible” (“roses / impossible,” “sky / impossibly deep,” “Impossible stems / ...of your hands”) as a kind of unsatisfying shorthand. I feel cheated, the grandiose adjective no substitute for more fully engaged, enacting language.

There are fine poems in the book — “Ghost Catchers,” “Night Wind,” “Winter Solstice,” and imaginings of planets named K37Y9 and H26L3 — and memorable images, such as angels five-eighths of an inch long, with flashlight beams catching “the facets of their wings,” and pine trees like “pictures of themselves / taken from inside the sun.” But over all *Demon Pond* is thin fare from an innovative, challenging poet, who earlier gave us the beauties of *Spring Trances in the Control Emerald Night* and *The Cenozoic Asylum*.

A LIFE IN THE ARTS

by Brian Fawcett

REINVENTING MYSELF

by Mavor Moore

Stackart, 368 pages \$27.95 cloth
(ISBN 07737 2748 2)



Mavor Moore

FOR A LONG TIME, Mavor Moore has struck me as one of the few consistently sane and cool heads within the Canadian cultural community, and when, several years ago, he gave up his *Globe and Mail* column and went into semi-retirement on the West Coast, I missed him. Partly this was because his *Globe* replacement, Bronwyn Drainie, had a grasp of national cultural issues that lapsed somewhere in the western wilds of Etobicoke, but it was also because Moore's Canadianism always seemed to be grounded in the world, not just inside the CBC building in downtown Toronto — as with Drainie.

His autobiography, *Reinventing Myself*, was therefore a book I came to with high expectations.

Reinventing Myself covers the first 50 years of Moore's life. Despite the fact that I'd be just as interested in what he has to say about the last 25 years, it is an extraordinary book — but not quite in the way I'd been hoping. It is, first of all, an incredible act of memory.

Moore either has a photographic (or rather, video-graphic) memory, or he's been keeping amazingly detailed diaries all his life. This is a guy who remembers the obscure lunch-time conversations he had in 1943 — the things said, who said them, what was on the menu, the whole kit. What he doesn't seem to have, unfortunately, is a way of scaling the prodigious details he's amassed. Far too many of his obscure lunch-time conversations were simply obscure lunch-time conversations. That

he remembers them is truly amazing, but what got said, and who said it, is too often considerably less than pertinent or interesting. Indeed, it is like watching film made by someone who, 40 or 50 years ago, set up a camera on a busy urban street. You watch the film, but after you've got the set down, and remarked on the arcane way people dressed, nothing much is happening.

Admittedly, my primary interest in Moore is in his long-standing role as an arts critic and cultural advocate, not in his career as an actor and playwright. And as one who tends to cower under his seat in shame for his entire

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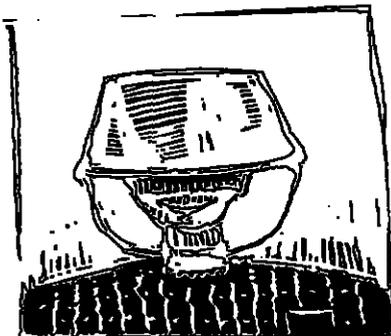
Douglas Fetherling, *Quill and Quire*

University of Toronto Press

species when actors start singing for no apparent reason, and as one who responded to the recent foolhardy over *Show Boat* with remarks to the effect that any musical theatre production is an act of cultural genocide, so why single out *Show Boat*, my eyes tend to glaze over when I read about Moore's herculean efforts to bring musicals to Canadian theatre audiences. I'm sure Canadian drama archivists will lose control of their bladders at what Moore has to tell them about the early days of Canadian theatre. I just wasn't listening.

There is, however, both an unexpected formalistic flip and an epic tale of courage and resourcefulness in *Reinventing Myself*. Late in the book Moore reveals that he has waged a life-long struggle with manic depression. It comes as a true kick to the stomach, because his rather florid way of describing his experiences — many of

which involved manic highs and very depressed lows — was something I'd taken simply as style, a kind of theatricality and exaggeration of perception and prose I'd privately agreed to suffer through out of respect for the man. When I realized that his struggles had a clinical dimension, I had to go back and reread long passages of the book, and redigest their now somehow more grave — and brave — contents. What I found was a remarkable, if not always readable, book by a man who is more remarkable than I knew.



BOOKS IN CANADA

DARK NIGHTS OF THE SOUL

by Elaine Kalman Naves

THE END

by Roch Carrier, translated by Sheila Fischman
Viking 374 pages, \$22.99 cloth
(ISBN 0 670 85454 9)

IN ENGLISH CANADA Roch Carrier is probably best known for the children's classic *The Hockey Sweater* and for *Prayers of a Very Wise Child*, which was awarded the 1992 Leacock Medal for humour. *The End* may therefore surprise some readers by its darkness, although Carrier's artistic vision has never been uniformly sunny. His first full-length book was *Jolis dévils* (literally "pretty mournings," as yet



Roch Carrier

untranslated). In his 30-year career as a novelist, playwright, and storyteller, violence, mutilation, and death have frequently appeared in his work.

The whimsy and rollicking comedy that lighten and illuminate many of Carrier's books carry a spiritual charge, for he views humour as a regenerative force. "The soul may become tired, bored, depleted," Carrier told me in an interview last year. "But if one arrives at renewing one's vision through humour, something invigorating happens....Humour refreshes everything."

"Suicide is an absolute absence of humour," a woman (a humour therapist, no less) observes to the world-weary protagonist of *The End* over a drink in a hotel bar. It's thus fitting, I suppose, that humour — as balm for the soul or otherwise — is notable by its absence from this strange little novel. For *The End* is the last will and testament of an aging and jaded man who is planning his own demise.

The ironically named protagonist,

Victor Joyeux, is a much-travelled *bon vivant* who has prospered as an engineer working in pre-stressed concrete. As a young man he had tried to be a poet, and it is with this earlier self that he attempts to reconnect as he meditates on the course of his life. It becomes evident as his story unfolds that he was spiritually bankrupt as a poet years before, and that he tried his hand at a number of occupations, at all of which he somehow came up short. He was married three times, abandoned his wives, and, as a young man, was implicated in a tragedy that resulted in the horrific deaths of several children.

Springing from the tradition of the French *conte* or *récit*, *The End* has almost no plot. As such, it must rely on language, character, and the power of its ideas in order to be convincing. In fact, the language of *The End* (seamlessly translated by Sheila Fischman) is often poetic, and there are touches of fantasy, irony, and satire that make the terrain recognizably Carrier's.

Joyeux also experiences some poignant emotions that he expresses simply and beautifully. His love for his children is deep and genuine, despite his absence from their daily lives. ("I love you more than I've ever loved any woman, any dish, any fruit, any country... It's through you that I've received what life has given me.") The articulation of his political ideas in counterpoint to those of his 20-year-old mistress Melissa's reveals him a staunch anti-nationalist. At first these ideas appear intrusive in the story, but they become a cry of the heart when Joyeux writes,

At my age you don't separate, you don't divide any more. After travelling so many roads, I've come to this hill from where we can see that everything is united, everything has assembled, that everything holds together.

But in the end, the contradictory musings and meditations of Joyeux irritate and confuse the reader. What is one to make of generalizations such as "Men all resemble one another, but women are unique"? Or of his denunciation of the homosexuality of his two sons: "If I should see you, my dear sons, wearing lace brassieres and panties, I reserve the right to burst into tremendous laughter from beyond the grave"?

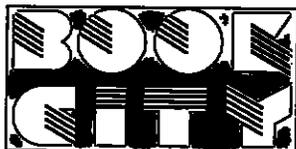
Ultimately, a book that hinges on suicide must be very clear about motivation. Yet I was actually more mystified about the impetus for Joyeux's act at the end of the book than I was at the beginning. As his self-imposed deadline approaches and is then put off, as he admits to fears that he is about to kill his soul, as he actually requests that his tombstone bear the message, "In spite of everything he still loves life," the expectation is built up that he may yet change his mind. The strangest touch of all is a three-page signed postscript by the author on how Joyeux's will fell into his hands and how he would have liked to have written it himself. Carrier — as Carrier — signs off by saying "I believe that the finest monument still is life."

The author of such arresting and ambitious novels as *La Guerre*, *Yes Sir!* and *Heartbreaks along the Road* has faltered here. The best epitaph for *The End*, pronounced by Joyeux, may unfortunately be "There are too many words in the world." ♦



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Time to Plant

Six new titles aimed at those who'd rather grow better than grow older

by BRIAN
FAWCETT

HERE'S SOMETHING I'll bet you didn't know. From the last decades of the 19th century up to the First World War, each Canadian Pacific Railroad station in western Canada had its own flower garden. The official purpose of these gardens was to welcome immigrants to their new settings, and to convince them that pioneer life would not be entirely without civilization. They were, in a sense, propaganda gardens, but the "railway garden" program quickly took on a life all its own, breeding horticultural societies and acting as a clearing-house for seed and expertise within each community. The corporation eventually appointed inspectors to enhance and guide the program — and probably to police black-thumbed stationmasters. Other railways — Canadian and American — instituted similar programs.

During the First World War all the rural railway gardens were torn out and replanted with vegetables, and after the war, corporate horticultural energies waned, becoming more like the ones we currently live with: guidelines calling for low-upkeep plantings and perennial landscaping — read asphalt and concrete — came into force. Still, the original railway gardens must have been a lovely, civilizing element in a landscape and culture short on both beauty and civilization.

A full recounting of the railway garden program, incidentally, is contained in Jan Mather's *Designing Alberta Gardens: The Complete Guide to Beautiful Gardens* (Red Deer College Press, 176 pages, \$16.95 paper). For those who think that Alberta garden design consists of hooking one of those strange farm contraptions onto a tractor, planting wheat, and then going to the bar to get really, really drunk while it snows for another month, this book will be something of a surprise. It's filled with colour plates of flowers, full-colour diagrams, and sensible advice about garden design.

The down side is that too many of the colour plates seem to be there merely to enhance the appearance of the book, and that the design advice is, in most cases, based on aesthetic considerations unrelated to local conditions in Alberta. The best chapter by far is the one that documents the railway gardens; and sadly, there is very little else here that speaks to anything more than a general interest in gardening. Since I already knew that Albertans are as fanatical

about gardening as their politicians are about staying a long distance to the loony right of any other politics in the country, I'd have been more impressed if this book had spoken directly to the specific conditions of Alberta's climate and spent less energy devising ways to make Edmonton resemble England. Still, it's attractive and useful — if you can ignore the political implications of its design advice.

Marjorie Harris and the photographer Tim Saunders have teamed up to produce *The Canadian Gardener's Guide to Foliage and Garden Design* (Random House, 208 pages, \$37 cloth), arguably the most gorgeous gardening volume ever published in Canada. Harris's commentary is elegant, intelligently organized, and splendidly detailed, while Saunders's landscape photography is as good as it gets. The only quibble I have is that the book should have been titled *The Wealthy Canadian Gardener's Guide to Foliage and Garden Design*. Nearly all the gardens photographed are spacious, and many are, well, grand. They're also, obviously, mature gardens, and beginners would do well to note that these are garden designs that take not just many dollars to create but many years to mature. This is not an instruction manual for impatient gardeners.

I wasn't a big fan of Harris's *The Canadian Gardener* when it came out a few years ago, and I thought her more recent *Ecological Gardening* was downright silly. But this book is plain fabulous. It's also national in scope, taking in the best gardens from across the country. At \$37 it's fairly expensive, but for garden admirers and dreamers — and for those with money and patience — it will be a must.

For years I've been saying that the *Reader's Digest Illustrated Guide to Gardening in Canada* is, dollar for dollar, the best gardening book available in this country. It is relatively cheap, well organized, and more than thorough enough in its detail for all but expert gardeners. Now Reader's Digest has come up with the *Practical Guide to Gardening in Canada: A Definitive Illustrated Manual of Gardening Techniques, Planning and Maintenance* (648 pages, \$59.95 cloth), edited by Christopher Brickell. It's more expensive than the *Illustrated Guide*, and is exactly what its publisher says it is: a practical manual, much heavier on technical detail than its sister volume, with 3,000 colour plates. It will take you through

nearly everything short of how to change a flat tire on the van you rented to pick up your garden landscaping materials.

In that sense it's a wonderful book, and it is tempting to suggest that, together with an encyclopaedia of garden plants, this is all anyone needs to be a competent gardener. But for all that, it's a manual, and has deliberately stayed clear of providing detailed information on the characteristics and likely behaviour of specific plants. And like all practical manuals, it presupposes that any technical difficulties can be surmounted. A quick glance through the Harris/Saunders volume demonstrates the sterility of that attitude: gardening is very much about imagination and intangibles. So, while I very much like and admire the *Practical Guide to Gardening in Canada*, I'll continue to recommend that budget-minded readers stay with the *Illustrated Guide* and don't let go of their gardening dreams for this kind of absolute practical knowledge.

David Harrap's *Roses for Northern Gardeners* (Lone Star Publishing, 63 pages, \$5.95 paper) is a universe away from the publishing dimensions of the Reader's Digest production, but despite its limitations it covers its subject quite well. The publisher was smart enough to know that colour plates of rose varieties couldn't have been offered without raising the cost of the book by at least \$20 per copy (and even then, very, very few colour plates of roses accurately convey the subtle colours these plants exhibit), but I do wish better illustrations had been provided, and I'd have liked some zone maps to tell readers exactly what is meant by "northern." Still, if you're interested in the tricky art of growing roses, this book is a good, cheap place to begin.

Gardeners on the West Coast — at least those who are right on the coast — may enjoy *Island Gardening: A Month-by-Month Guide for West Coast Gardeners* (Orca, 200 pages, \$15.95 paper), by Ramona Sommer. Because seasonal weather patterns — anywhere in Canada — tend to be unpredictable, I don't much like month-to-month gardening books, but this is among the better ones, and relatively inexpensive. The information Sommer offers is generally accurate, if sometimes uninformatively laconic — professional gardeners like Sommer who advise amateurs to "dig deep" without saying what that means are, for instance, close to behaving perniciously. I don't think that what she tells us about vines is completely accurate, and her recommended vegetable-garden choices are, well, pedestrian. Still, the tone of this book is unfailingly pleasant, and it will be a comforting addition to the libraries of West Coast gardeners. If you don't live there, forget about this one: it'll simply get you depressed about how late spring comes in the rest of the country.

A couple of years ago, when Vancouver's Whitecap Books published Des Kennedy's *Living Things We Love to Hate*, I wasn't very kind, suggesting, not very subtly, that the author had eaten too many squash pies for his own good. On the



From *The Canadian Gardener's Guide to Foliage and Garden Design*

strength of Kennedy's new book, *Crazy About Gardening: Reflections on the Sweet Seductions of a Garden* (Whitecap, 224 pages, \$16.95 paper), I have to revise my opinion. I still think he's got squash pie stuck between his ears, but this time he's written a thoroughly charming and knowledgeable volume of gardening essays.

Crazy About Gardening is more of a philosophical ramble than a true gardening book, and includes neither colour plates nor detailed plans for your garden. But Kennedy's essays are filled with colour and good sense, and underlying them is a solid core of research and knowledge. The combination is hard to resist. Most serious gardeners are also readers, and this is the kind of book to browse through while you're in the garden taking breaks between planting and plant maintenance. I'd probably end up shooting Kennedy if he moved in next door, but I'll be grateful for his literary companionship while I'm loafing in my own garden this summer — if I ever get a spare moment from replacing all the winter-kill I've suffered. I recommend this book, along with the season's other gardening titles. ♦

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FICTION

CHAUCER'S Nun's Priest was fond of saying *Amor vincit omnia*, and it is as true in David Helwig's new novel, *Just Say the Words* (Oberon, 311 pages, \$34.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper), as it was on the road to Canterbury in the 14th century.

Helwig's novel ranges from London and Shanghai to Toronto and Muskoka, and from the 1940s to the 1990s, in its exploration of a pentangle of love: the relationships between Charles, Martin, Ruthie, and Vera, who are all anchored to each other in the past, and Sam, who links their lives and loves to continuity and the future.

Helwig writes with compassion and understanding of the tangled web of their connections, thus winning the reader's sympathy for his characters as the flawed but decent human beings they are. In return, he offers an unusually perceptive and generous evocation of the power of love and the resilience of the human spirit.

Just Say the Words reads with the pace and control of a good short story — indeed, it is in essence a collection of connected short stories about love and lovers. Helwig manages plot and character with consummate ease and craft, and his detailed evocation of past ages and long-forgotten societies is acute and pleasurable.

That love conquers all is a truism we have learned to treat with a certain cynical circumspection, and yet Helwig manages to convince us that it can be true.

ROGER BURFORD MASON

IT IS A minor convention that every sleuth in any series eventually goes on vacation. In Medora Sale's *Short Cut to Santa Fe* (Viking Penguin, 306 pages, \$25.95 cloth), Harriet Jeffries and Police Inspector John Sanders meet in New Mexico for a sightseeing tour. Before they can be joined there by Kate Grosvenor, a friend of

Harriet's, they encounter two stranded children and, soon after that, a hijacked bus. The corpses and the complications then start to multiply. Who on the bus is not what he or she claims to be? The answer revolves around a shady businessman with political connections and his alienated wife. Harriet and John extricate themselves and the other innocents and then help the local state troopers find the bad guys; after her own mostly isolated adventures, Kate finds love and the possibility of happiness.

Sale writes well most of the time, but her settings feel more painted than real and the book lacks atmosphere. Sanders is only a rough sketch of an interesting cop; Rodriguez, his local counterpart, is more interesting. Generally, the women are better drawn than the men. The plot is a convoluted mess, with too many characters in play and a resolution too complex to satisfy. If you consume a lot of books like this, you'll swallow *Short Cut to Santa Fe* without choking. If you don't, then to the extent this kind of thing is worth doing, it's done better by others.

MATTHEW KUDRKA

WITH ITS TITLE and epigraph taken from Derek Walcott ("There are no more elders / Is only old people"), Austin Clarke's *There Are No Elders* (Exile, 167 pages, \$14.95 paper) promises insights into deep social problems. In particular, one expects it to address the much-discussed lack of role models — or "elder statesmen," as it were — in many urban communities.

What we get instead is a poorly edited book of stories, each with a theme lifted (it might seem) from afternoon talk-shows. Child abuse, rape, wife assault, prostitution — each topic has its own story. Other stories evoke questions such as "What if your brother was an alcoholic?" or "What if your children left you for your ex-spouse?"

Perhaps these topic-driven stories would be bearable given fresh writing and complicated narrators. But Clarke's prose is ruined by too many awkward descriptions ("the word [spleen] has a collapsing sound in its meaning, whatever its meaning is"), failed tropes, and a frequent forced attempt at a punchy rhythm, using short consecutive sentences. Several of the stories have first-person narrators, but often the point of view is so vague or undefined that they might as well be second or third person.

That said, a few stories are memorable. "They're Not Coming Back" (Clarke has a bad ear for titles) focuses on a mother's pain when her children opt to live with their father. As she slips slowly into drunkenness, we are given beautifully paced flashbacks to her earlier life. And the final story, about a reunion between childhood friends, displays Clarke's obvious gift for dialogue.

But while reading these generally disappointing stories I felt nostalgic for the work of Morley Callaghan — who, ironically enough, was the father of this book's publisher. In a few pages Callaghan could render the lives of city dwellers vividly and dramatically, which is something Austin Clarke, judging by *There Are No Elders*, seems unable to do.

GLENN SUMI

NON-FICTION

WHEN DI BRANDT became a mother, she began wondering where all the books about mothers were. Her *Wild Mother Dancing: Maternal Narrative in Canadian Literature* (University of Manitoba, 197 pages, \$17.95 paper) explains where they are, at least in Canadian literature. Brandt believes that patriarchal Western culture has edited mothers out of the literary canon from the time of Aeschylus's

Oresteia on. But she suspects that "mother stories," written by women who "have escaped colonization," might be creeping back into Canadian literature. So she hopscoches through genres and Canadian subcultures to find maternal narrative, from the "mother story" pioneer Margaret Laurence's Prairie novels to Malaysian-born Daphne Marlatt's prose poems on motherhood to Katherine Martens's audiotaped Mennonite childbirth stories.

Unfortunately, *Wild Mother Dancing* reads like the Ph.D. dissertation it once was. Written in criticspeak ("valorized," "essentializing," and "post-Saussurean"), it is a specialist's book. This is a pity; it could be simple, incendiary. Worse — Brandt, despite her best feminist intentions, tends to edit mothers out too. She includes works better described as daughter stories, since they're narrated by women remembering and recreating their mothers (Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Jovette Marchessault's trilogy). She does focus on childbirth scenes, but there's more on "motherhood issues" (environmentalism, nuclear disarmament) than on mothering.

I wish Brandt were more of a wild mother herself. She can occasionally make the reader rage and exult with her about texts and gender politics. But it will take more than this book to bring mothers back into the canon.

SHERYL HALPERN

IN THAT sometimes fertile ground between the novel's art and the immediacy of journalism, Rick Boychuk has found a gem of a story to tell. *Honour Thy Mother* (Viking, 369 pages, \$25.99 cloth) follows the troubled path of Raymond Durand, a Hull native who never met a person he didn't try to con. From his home province of Quebec to Florida, Texas, California, British Columbia, and back again, Durand systematically cheated business partners, lovers, and

even his own children out of life savings, basic dignity, or just a couple of bucks. Whatever he could get. But did he commit the ultimate crime?

Boychuk first saw Durand in a television news clip: the peripatetic con man was being hauled into a Texas court, charged with the murder of his first wife, Jeannine Boissoneault Durand, a murder that happened nearly a quarter-century before. Wondering how a fellow Canadian had gotten into such a predicament, and how the prosecution was going to convict anyone for such an old crime, Boychuk followed up the trial for a *Saturday Night* feature, and in so doing discovered a story so compelling it needed a book to tell.

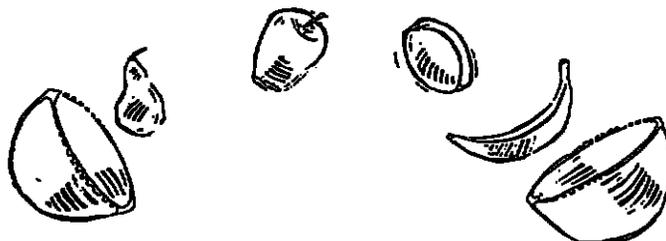
As a stylist, Boychuk is no Capote or Mailer, but his sharp eye for detail, his prodigious research skills, and the great trust he establishes with his interviewees do much more than blow the dust off an old story. He presents Durand as the consummate villain, an amoral, apolitical chameleon of seething violence, treachery, and deceit — with just enough remorse to be tragically human. He also portrays the scores of victims with great sensitivity, especially Durand's offspring. At heart, *Honour Thy Mother* is an often disquieting read about the systematic brutalization of children and the path to salvation they follow — in part with Boychuk's help — as adults. The fact that some of Durand's children still show a reluctance to criticize their father — despite every possible justification — goes a long way toward explaining the modern term "dysfunctional family."

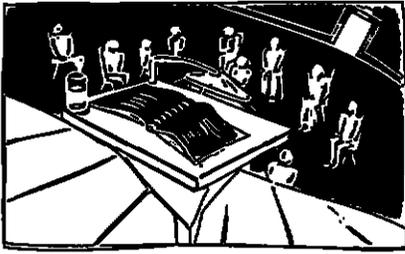
ALLAN CASEY

IN "buttercup poem," Mary Dalton opens her new book *Allowing the Light* (Breakwater, 61 pages, \$9.95 paper) with a sunny, "simple / face" and an invitation: "look in, all's clear." She declares "this poem is open," as distinct from those poems that offer what she calls "a syntax of torture." In a later piece, she returns to this self-definition through contrast as she characterizes the poetics of both the modern ("rags and melancholy") and postmodern ("parentheses at her wrists / made of glass, a-glitter"), and implies her distance from them.

These poems, says her publisher, "seek to allow the music of that which is muted in a world of hellowing." Perhaps Dalton hopes they also "bespeak an enfolding / absorption," as she says of certain Vermeer paintings. But for me, the poems themselves, and not merely their subjects, are often muted, and not nearly enfolding or absorbing enough. Only in the last section, which focuses on Dalton's native Newfoundland, is a truly distinctive voice audible, as when Mr. O'Brien says his tea is so strong that "a little mouse / could run over it." Yet here too, Dalton often simplifies when more subtlety and imagination seem called for; the short poem "dead Indians," for example, feels so slight and predictable as to demean its serious theme. While I respect Dalton's commitment to her poetics, and share much of her resistance to tortuous syntax, simplicity and openness are not the only important values in poetry. Dalton may yet have something to learn from those complex poems she dislikes so much.

GLEN DOWNIE





Bearing Witness

by GEORGE ELLIOTT CLARKE

IF BOOKS are messengers, then 11 new apostles have arrived, speaking in tongues and working occasional miracles. They brave our judgements.

The Door of My Heart (Pottersfield, 96 pages, \$9.95 paper) is Maxine Tynes's fourth book. The Black Nova Scotian writer, winner of the 1988 Milton Acom People's Poet Award, protests estranging "isms" and exalts love and culture:

*Let's just be dark, then
with arms and legs hued in dark oak
ash, mahogany
this body bronzed or blackened like trees
("Let's Just Be Dark")*

Though her talent is still maturing, and few poems are wholly right, Tynes's work is compelling, and she can marshal real power: "their vowels and consonants rain down / fall like knives" ("Graffiti Portrait").

Kate Taylor's *The Dragon Papers* (Muses' Company, 104 pages, \$12 paper) is the Montreal poet's second — beautifully designed — collection. It's a satire on "the academics' attitude concerning literature" and hence ransacks English literature, piling hieratic allusions atop contemporary slang, scientific jargon, and sharp puns. Taylor creates a text that, while often lyrical, resists interpretation:

*I sing of peaches ripening
on coral stems, of tortoisés' heads
and peonies blossoming open...*

*Nobody knows of what I sing
That is the agony of it all.
(untitled)*

Though her wordplay recalls that of other Montréalais such as A. M. Klein and Erin Mouré, Taylor's muse sinks at times into a maelstrom of words.

Full Sun (Muses' Company, 129 pages, \$14 paper) collects the selected poems of Ken Norris, a Big Apple-born poet who summers in Montreal. Like the fine cover photo of gangling sunflowers, Norris's poems are often baroque: "The bright colors and dark skin, / sleeping bodies lying on pandanus mats, / the teeth of smiling girls and curves of waists" ("Tristes Tropiques"). He conveys emotion vividly in a few vital poems,

particularly "Guitar Lessons," "The Heart's Capability," and "In Montreal," which includes the following passage:

*The poet's life ends quick in Montreal,
we burn out like stars.
our beautiful butterfly wings fall away
and we become merely ordinary.*

Given such lines, Norris should be able to avoid the martyrdom they portray.

Stephen Morrissey's *The Compass* (Empyrean, 69 pages, \$10 paper) is the first book in a projected "Shadow Trilogy" by the Montreal poet. These confessional, discursive poems are richly emotive, accumulating energy — like Richard Lemm's work — as their domestic dramas unfold. "Bitter Fruit," for example, wrings great power from apparent simplicity:

*Salt on the white wound of the first
bite, that's how we ate green apples
as children. Blood where I'd cut my lip
soaked into the apple's white flesh.
Everything is bitter to me now.*

Morrissey's poems build to their conclusions, which then open into larger associations. The talent demonstrated is like that of Yeats; Morrissey's lines of stainless steel gleam with a dangerous, piercing beauty.

Christopher Levenson's eighth book, *Duplicities* (Mosaic, 117 pages, \$12.95 paper), features new and selected poems from 1959 to the present. A British-born Ottawan, Levenson possesses a keen sense of history and is perhaps both a Canadian and a Commonwealth poet. He speaks of love, travel, and exile, across a range of forms, and his meditative tone always rings true, as in "Bathysphere":

*So too the poem descends,
encounters fish that veer
or slide, jungled in weed,
translucent, diaphanous.
It is a new world,
and poetry like love
is a form of knowing,
a shape we must hold and weigh.*

Though a few poems fall flat, *Duplicities* is a fine collection.

A *New Remembrance* (TSAR, 48 pages, \$10.95 paper) is the debut of Kaushalya Bannerji, an Indian-born Torontonian who writes laconic lyrics on such issues as the Gulf War, the 1987 killing of Anthony Griffin — a Black — by a Montreal cop, and the Intifada. Bannerji is flagrantly political; her chiselled poems recall the epigrams of Dionne Brand:

*I am from the country
Columbus dreamed of.
You, the country
Columbus conquered.
Now in your land
my words are circling
blue Oka sky
they come back to us
alight on tongue.
("Oka Nada")*

Given their honed, Age-of-Reason style, Bannerji's poems can seem cold. She should write more pieces as lyrical as "My Dida's House," her best work.

Lillian Allen, another Toronto poet, also addresses politics. *Women Do This Every Day* (Women's Press, 143 pages, \$12.95 paper) presents Allen's selected poems, which are gleaned from records as well as books. Arguing that "words don't (always) need pages," the Juno Award-winning, Jamaican-born writer offers such "dub" (performance) poems as "My Momma": "When it came to being revolutionary / my Momma she stood up for us / she would fight off a bus." Allen's poems of social angst, Jamaicanglish, jazzy typescript, and even sweet imagery ("Mauve manoeuvres, full in the blue room / broken green of twilight") deserve attention.

Jiggers (Turnstone, 66 pages, \$9.95 paper), the second book by the Winnipeg poet Todd Bruce, is the gospel of its eponymous "alcoholic anti-hero." A narrative lyric sequence, the work repeats the style of Ondaatje's *Billy the Kid*: "My parrot flew straight into the electric heater. Got tangled in the coils. Fried to death." Scill, Bruce offers some original imagery: "northern lights like mad dogs / running in broken harnesses" ("bettern hot soup"). Though flawed, *Jiggers* reveals Bruce to be a poet of significant potential.

In *Cantos from a Small Room* (Wolsak and Wynn, 88 pages, \$10 paper), his seventh collection, the Calgary poet Robert Hilles sifts through the diurnal to chronicle small facts and the larger matter of mortality in meditative elegies on his mother-in-law's death. These cantos are, by turns, both moving and monotonous:

*You take a shit or fuck all night but listen
all the time listen to the world hiss and a
snake wrapped around your arm whistles in
your ear with a soft tongue.
("Canto 10")*

Hilles's poems are prolix and verge on the prosaic; thoughts seem thrown in as they occur. But when Hilles concentrates, as in "Jesus," he's a poet of genius:

*Shadows fell across Jesus' face as he
wept high above the crowd...
He knew that
History would take a long time to
bend the light away from his face.*

Gospel: A Poem (Red Deer College, 72 pages, \$9.95 paper), by the Governor General's Award-winning Victoria poet Stephen Scobie, ventriloquizes the voice of Christ. This "long poem" — actually a narrative lyric sequence — offers a new New Testament apocryphal work, but one that the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (the "Witnesses") should distribute. Like the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Scobie's work imagines a humanized deity:

*Understand me: I meant it literally.
I remember my birth.
I remember it as pain and light,
as compression of air
opening my lungs to cry
the Word made flesh. I remember
how much it hurt my mother.*

The beauty of *Gospel* arises from its clarity, its simplicity, and though portions of it seem too spare, Scobie's poem yields moments of real intensity. As the millennium lurches to its close, it's right that Christ should enjoy a kind of Second Coming — in word if not in flesh.

Leonard Gasparini's *Selected Poems* (Hounslow, 112 pages, \$14.99 paper) honours the Dark Romanticism of Baudelaire: "There is no evil so great / That love cannot accommodate" ("Inscription"). His subjects include the powerful true story of a woman who dies, sitting in a tree, and whose body is discovered only after autumn winds have stripped away the leaves:

*Did squirrels bury nuts and seeds inside her pockets?
During the long Ontario autumn nights*

*She shrank into herself —
A stark, unyielding branch
Stuck in the wind's throat.*

("Elegy")

The work of this Ontario-born West Coast poet is often only good in parts; still, his conclusions are effective, and Jill Gasparini's nature morte cover photo is excellent.

Though many are called, few are chosen. Levenson, Hilles, Scobie, and especially Morrissey are those whose works seem the most consistently inspired, the most persistently persuasive. They bear witness. ♦



Human Miscalculations

by MAUREEN McCALLUM GARVIE

ALTHOUGH Audrey Schulman has been writing novels for years, *The Cage* (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill/Thomas Allen, 228 pages, \$22.95 cloth) is the first of them to be published. Her long apprenticeship has been fruitful: *The Cage* falls somewhere between *The Bell Jar* with bears and Stephen King with grace. As a still photographer on an Arctic shoot for a glossy wildlife magazine, Beryl has no illusions about why she was hired: a steel cage specially built for taking pictures of polar bears has turned out to be too skimpy for most male photographers, and she is small. Beryl regards modest size and ambition as essentials for survival, personal and metaphysical, while massiveness and its attendant hubris are markers of doom.

Schulman's prose is cool and intelligent, her imagery arresting. A polar bear in a zoo, its fur infected with algae, is "the color of lime Jell-O." The bear cage, a tidy metaphor for Beryl's private space, echoes throughout the book; a large man pressing himself on her in the front seat of a car before her departure prefigures the great bears pawing the bars.

Beryl and the crew leave Churchill, Manitoba, in a state-of-the-art van, looking for bears. But it is soon clear that the mistake in cage measurements was only the first of many human miscalculations. In this unforgiving environment, things rapidly go wrong, far beyond the wildest fears of Beryl's mother. The conclusion is so horrific that we recoil, distancing ourselves from characters we have come to know intimately. It was days after I finished the book before I warmed up.

Mary di Michele, also under the guise of a thriller, takes on urgent issues of gender, desire, and love. In *Under My Skin* (Quarry, 269 pages, \$16.95 paper) a film-publicity flack named Rita Latte pitches to a producer a novel she has written about a Toronto doctor who rapes by night and heals by day. Within this metafiction, Latte's *alter ego* (also named Rita) goes about her business, working, meeting friends, jogging, all the time coming ever closer to a dire fate. An accomplished poet, di Michele deftly manipulates imagery and irony, and her prose can be vividly sensual. But her inexperience with the novel form shows up in plodding narration and flat dialogue. Characters mull over dinnerware patterns, turn on windshield wipers, and organize lawn chairs as di Michele deliberately, if sometimes tediously, builds a matrix of domestic detail. Meanwhile, she is setting up currents of terror and violence to sweep it all away. Di Michele's central theme of women's control of their bodies takes many forms, reflected most chillingly in the doctor's psychotic focus. In a powerfully disturbing scene, he watches a solitary woman in a restaurant eat a messy hamburger, interpreting her every move, even her lack of self-consciousness, as provocative behaviour.

Two other women writers, Michelle Spring and Sparkle Hayter, approach genre writing more conventionally to produce polished, professional whodunits. Spring's *Every Breath You Take* (Pocket Books, 246 pages, \$25 cloth), whose title is taken from Sting's song (the next line is "I'll be watching you"), reflects careful study of the feminist aca-

demic whodunit sub-genre. Born on Vancouver Island, Spring now teaches sociology in Britain, and her handling of the university milieu is convincing. Her sleuth is Laura Principal, a Cambridge grad now in investigation work. This case is personal: a prospective housemate, an artist in residence at the university, has been beaten to death. The pace is brisk, the conclusion credible. At times Principal's relationship with her partner seems, in the face of two life-threatening attacks, altogether too flip-pant. The book's passion comes from its theme that women academics must look out for each other in what is still overwhelmingly a masculine domain.

In *What's a Girl Gotta Do* (General, 270 pages, \$27.95 cloth), Sparkle Hayter shows that she too knows whereof she writes. Hayter has worked for CNN and done gigs as a stand-up comic; her prose, pyrotechnic with rapid-fire one-liners, is as good as her name. Her sleuth, Robin Hudson, is a TV newswoman with an attitude; an on-air belch at a White House press conference has busted her back to the minors. When a blackmailer is murdered at a New Year's party, she musters her reportorial skills to uncover evidence. The mystery is less interesting than her methods (poison ivy and an Epilady are her favourite defensive weapons), her running feud with her ex-husband, and the ambience of network newsrooms, New York bars, and nightspots.

In *Deadly Spirits* (Stoddart, 230 pages, \$18.95 paper), Philip Marchand, book columnist of the *Toronto Star*, also uses the news world as backdrop, though

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Solution to Acrostic # 63

"And *punctuality* was the clunk a time
clock made when you punched your
card in. Whoever named *punctuality*
knew what he was doing. There were
lots of words like that. If a guy knew
them all, understood them all, he
could pretty well get by on his own."
The Crew, by Don Dickinson
(McClelland & Stewart)

his ex-alcoholic hero Heywood ("Call me Hal") Murphy has lost his newspaper job after a drunken junkie to London. At a detox clinic he bonds with a City Hall employee named Charles LeRoy; LeRoy ends up with a knife in his chest and Hal is both chief witness and suspect. Newshound Hal chases after what to the rest of us would seem like straws in the wind, and comes up with hay. Marchand's hard-boiled plot embraces pimps, prostitutes, religious communards, deprogrammers, and Forest Hill philanthropists (the jacket copy suggests we should recognize some models). Two overly cute Native characters named Wolf and Kelly take on the role of white man's guardians. The plot moves briskly but develops too much ballast in the last quarter, and by the time the murderer stepped forward, all I really wanted to know was how, after 20-odd years of unemployment, LeRoy landed that City Hall office job.

Di Michele and Marchand could both have profited from more stringent editing, but the strongest candidate for the knife here is Paul William Roberts's *The Palace of Fears* (Random House, 300 pages, \$27 cloth). It is not a mystery, except for the questions it raises as to why Random House chose to publish it. Framed by pompous quotations from the Koran, Bob Dylan, and Jerome Deshusses, and purportedly based on "translations and interpretations — including my own — of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and the Tibetan Book of the Dead," this is actually a primitively picaresque novel about a priapic hero named Barrett Magnus Ceiddan, born in the Blitz. One of the few engaging characters is Barrett's grandfather, an irascible Donleavesque eccentric who uplifts the boy from his working-class home and leaves him with other geriatric relations to be educated. A final training session as a catamite in Chelsea catapults Barrett into the world of swinging London. Marrying money, he becomes fabulously rich, then goes off to an African country to settle a rev-

olution: "What exactly did I do for Rosie in Gobistan? It's prudent not to say." (Not to mention too laborious to write.) Passing through silly old Toronto customs, Barrett is nabbed for carrying wads of cash. In jail he pounds out a screenplay, then heads for Hollywood. The film sweeps the Oscars.

Throughout, Barrett honks away at anything on two legs, all the while yearning for some scruffy flake named Angie, who appears between pages 109 and 122. I treasure especially lines like "It was then she told me she'd had an abortion. A vast shadow fell over our days."

At the other end of the scale is Cynthia Holz's *Onlyville* (The Porcupine's Quill, 192 pages, \$14.95 paper), elegantly produced with moody woodcuts by Gerard Brender à Brandis. *Onlyville* is a seedy summer community on an island off the eastern seaboard (rather like the Toronto Islands with a briny smell). As Watergate breaks, Anna leaves her boyfriend, Sal, and their hippie life to hole up at the family cottage and sort herself out. She brings her sewing machine, planning to make kids' clothes to sell, but soon all of her energies go — unsuccessfully — into repelling boarders. First to appear is Sal, a writer zealously intent on exposing Richard Nixon (his life loses all meaning when his nemesis resigns). Next come Anna's niece and a friend, then her father's girlfriend. Her father and brother make demands by phone. The only missing figure is Anna's mother, drowned off the *Onlyville* beach 15 years earlier.

Funny and tragic, Holz's narrative moves from 1974 back to 1959, forward to 1970, back to 1953, on to 1974 again, filling in earlier summers and memories. Though the dislocations in time, combined with Anna's disengagement from her lover and family, have a distancing effect that blunts the book's impact slightly, *Onlyville* is a fine piece of work. Holz's first story collection, *Home Again*, was called "fresh" and "subtle": her first novel is that and more. ♦



Finding New Homes

by DIANA BREBNER



SPRING HAS SPRUNG (finally) and behold,

birthday party season is upon us. Is it my imagination or are there more children's birthday parties in the late spring than at any other time of year? I blame family planning for the fact that I spend most Friday evenings of May and June shopping for birthday presents. I guess I wasn't the only expectant mother-bear who slept her way through a long winter 11 years ago looking forward to a spring and summer of wheeling a screeching little bundle around the block.

It's my good fortune that my daughters and their friends are bears for books. A visit to the bookstore is one of our favourite solutions to party-present panic. Picture-books are always a

From Noguchi the Samurai

welcome gift for the teddy-bear set. Our only difficulty is in making a selection.

Three new picture-books won't make that choice any easier. *The Baritone Cat* (Lester, 32 pages, \$16.95 cloth), by Mora Skelton, is a charming story in the car-has-home, car-loses-home, car-finds-new-home tradition that children never seem to tire of. Rough-and-tumble Sam values food, his singing voice, and his freedom to roam. When his indulgent elderly owner falls ill Sam must learn to survive on his own. While I don't mind a little anthropomorphism, I bristle when, towards the end of the

book, Sam talks himself into giving up his freedom for the comfort of a new home. His "self-talk" sounds like pop psychotherapy, hardly seems car-like, and is most definitely not Sam-like. This small irritation is more than assuaged by the vibrant, gentle, and entirely appropriate illustrations by Janet Wilson.

A Wilderness Passover (Red Deer College Press, 32 pages, \$15.95 cloth), by Kathleen Cook Waldron, is another example of a felicitous melding of illus-

trations and text. Leslie Gould's soft, airy watercolours are suffused with the pale greens and yellows of spring that herald the Passover holiday. Louie, Susan, and their parents are preparing for their first Passover away from the city and their much loved relatives. Their new home is in a rural area and the wilderness they find themselves in is not so much natural as it is spiritual. Mama refuses to prepare a Seder without proper food and the hope of companionship. Papa and the children go ahead with preparations and surprise Mama with a touching celebration.

The book emphasizes the importance of careful preparation for the holiday. *The Passover depicted is relaxed, joyous, and inventive.* A special page at the end of the book explains the history of the festival, the traditions associated with it, and the significance of the foods served at the ritual Seder.

Let's face it. There are some kids who just don't like to read. They would rather be on the soccer field, riding their bikes, or playing with plastic turtle-warriors. Burt Konzak's *Noguchi the Samurai* (Lester, 32 pages, \$16.95 cloth) might be just the thing for your local ninja. Konzak, a teacher of Zen Buddhism, is also an experienced karate instructor for adults and children. The story of *Noguchi the samurai* comes from the Zen tradition and is usually told as a complement to martial-arts training. Young *Noguchi* believes he is the greatest warrior in all Japan, but really he is just a big bully. He terrorizes his fellow passengers on a ferry boat until *Michihara*, an elderly samurai, defeats him in a challenge to determine who is the greatest fighter. *Noguchi* learns the true meaning of being a samurai as a consequence of his encounter with *Michihara*.

As the story unfolds Konzak maintains the lilt and cadence of a traditional tale. The atmosphere of old Japan saturates the text. We read about the ferry dock with its smell of oranges, dried fish, and incense, and encounter

Kuzu-ya the rag dealer, the serene and wily *Michihara*, and bombastic *Noguchi*. The historically accurate illustrations by Johnny Wales abound with scenes and items from traditional Japanese life. His watercolours are an odd blend of punkiness and serenity that is initially unsettling, but ultimately endearing and enlightening.

When my daughters have pockets full of allowance or birthday money from Grandma they like to browse and choose "chapter books" for themselves and their friends. Hey, they're paying. Am I going to complain? For readers new to chapter books Carol Matas gives us *The Lost Locket* (Scholastic, 80 pages, \$3.95 paper). Matas writes with clarity, energy, and humour to create warm, realistic characters. Eight-year-old Roz has lost an heirloom locket at school. She just has to find it before her parents find out. It turns out that Curtis, the class bully, has taken it and he won't give it back. What is Roz going to do? Every child will recognize a little of themselves in Roz. She has a pesky little brother, a bossy best friend, and the support of a weird but nice boy named David who is the junior version of the man of our dreams: funny, sensitive, non-violent, and a real smart cookie.

Betty Waterton's *Quincy Rumpel and the Mystifying Experience* (Groundwood, 96 pages, \$5.95 paper) is the latest in the Quincy Rumpel series, which features Quincy and her zany family. These people are strange. Their relatives are strange. Everything they touch, everywhere they go, from Niagara Falls with heart-shaped beds, to Toronto airport and its drug-sniffing beagle, to Aunt Fan's cottage at Lake Wannabanana with its lawn statues of Snow White and her dwarfs, is imbued with strange. Is this the real Canada? You bet.

Just Call Me Boom Boom (Scholastic, 144 pages, \$4.50 paper), by Martyn Godfrey, is geared toward older boys. Godfrey is described as a reluctant-student-turned-teacher-

turned-writer, and he seems to be writing for the reluctant reader. Bryan Benjamin "Boom Boom" Bortorowski has always been the biggest kid in his class. Everybody knows he is basically a good guy but his powder-keg temper keeps getting him into trouble. Boom Boom antagonizes the principal, his writing-club instructor, and his arm-wrestling dream-girl Gusty. Throw in a haunted house, a stolen art treasure in his pocket, and an out-of-control roller-coaster ride and you've got lots of action and attitude to keep the pages turning. The style is pure macho and the vocabulary current. If it gets the male airheads reading I guess it deserves a few points.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is *Light Magic* (Owl/Greey de Pencier, 64 pages, \$9.95 paper), by Trudy Rising and Peter Williams, with illustrations by Jane Kuriscu. The book's science activities, presented in the familiar Owl magazine style, focus on forms of energy. They make use of simple items like paper clips, string, and tin foil, and the instructions seem easy enough for older children to follow without help. This is the kind of book I often buy as a birthday present. Do other people's kids actually do the activities? Mine don't. But they are always happy to get the books. Maybe they read them in bed at night with a flashlight.

In the end, when it comes to books, the proof is in the wanting. There's a waiting list for my review copies. Sarah, my 11-year-old, has put in her dibs for *Light Magic*. My friend Susan will get *A Wilderness Passover* for her kids, and the paperback novels will be welcome prizes at the school book fair. And, someday, when I can give them up, *Noguchi the Samurai* and *The Baritone Cat* will make lovely birthday presents. ♦





Writers and Politics

by MICHAEL COREN

I HAVE an enormous problem with writers who become overtly political and ally themselves to a particular political party. It is for this reason that I am not a member of the Writers' Union of Canada. Although I admire and respect some of the union's work I question the political infighting and strutting that occurs, which is often initiated and carried out by people who have in common the single fact that they do very little writing. There is a clear "line" on display here and it is not for me. Fair enough. Nobody is obliged to join and I would hope that those who are members of the union would respect such a decision. I would also hope that they would respect the decision of those who, in the light of recent events, have decided to resign.

But at least Canadian writers do not identify with actual parties in the manner or to the extent of their more fatuous American and European comrades. A writer entering the political arena in such a way is, to tamper with the former British prime minister Stanley Baldwin's remark about those he called the prostitutes in the press, a case of no power and no responsibility — the prerogative of the fool down the ages.

In Britain during the last election, all the major political parties pillaged reference works such as *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* in an effort to grab a few names for their propaganda. Travelling back through the centuries: Christopher Marlowe wrote anti-immigration pamphlets for the government, Grub Street bulged with hacks who would promote Whig or Tory in return for a good beef-and-ale dinner,

and, of course, Benjamin Disraeli made his reputation as a rather fine novelist.

If we look a little deeper there is Henry Williamson, author of *Tarka the Otter*, amongst others, spreading the bloody and bloodstained cause of fascism, and dozens of useful idiots fellow-travelling along the road of dialectical materialism from Wigan Pier to Siberian Gulag. Ezra Pound supported Mussolini, Hemingway threw in his lot with the Spanish republicans, Bernard Shaw thought he had seen the future in the new Soviet Union; even more oddly, he thought that it worked. In Canada we have the likes of the Quebec poet Gérard Godin, who is also a well-known politician.

But there have always been the others, the more sensible, the less arrogant, the laudable Laodiceans. In Canada, with the rare exceptions of people such as Godin, they have dominated, and blessings on them for that. The point to be made is that as soon as writers join or offer full commitment to a political party they are, at best, lending or, at worst, giving part of their souls to an organization that stands for all sorts of policies and platforms. This is precisely what happened to so many well-meaning men and women in the 1920s and 1930s when they saw the rise of fascism in Europe. In reaction to this they submerged their capacities for original and mature thought in a sea of facile emotionalism. The Communist Party, they cried, was the only body standing up to the dictators in black — so they embraced the dictators in red.

When the Montreal intellectuals and the Toronto activists thought that

Bolshevism might be nice, they signed a document metaphorically in favour of mass murder, social engineering, death camps, and crass imperialism. They should, they really should, have known better. Yet the century of the political party, of the National Socialists, the Bolsheviks, the Khmer Rouge, appears to have taught some authors hardly anything at all. We still see the bright young novelists, the aged writers of historical tomes, the pillars of conventional liberal wisdom, leaving their expensive houses and their book-lined studies and arriving at the conferences and the convention centres, announcing to sound-bite-addicted hacks that the party knows best, waving the flag and wearing the rosette.

The good news is that the party never knows best. Nor does the community or the commune, the collective or the club, the union or the association. Truth lies with the individual. As long as that is engraved on the thought patterns of every author we will be safe from party harm. Once we give up personal, individual thought we are standing at the top of an intellectual and moral slide that has its end placed firmly in hellish oblivion.

I have no respect for writers who boast that they have just come from a party meeting. I would have far more regard for them if they told me that they had spent the weekend behind a dusty desk, reading dusty books in a dusty library. There are no political dictates in libraries — not yet, at least, nor will there be while the supremacy of unique and individual thought is championed by all those who describe themselves as writers. ♦

3 B	4 D	5 G	6 K	7 R	8 E	9 B	10 G	11 H	12 X	13 C	14 D	15 H	16 A	17 S	18 M	19 E	20 U	
21 K	22 J	23 B	24 F	25 A	26 L	27 V	28 R	29 J	30 T	31 O	32 B	33 D	34 I	35 V	36 O	37 A		
38 B	39 C	40 M	41 P	42 S	43 L	44 O	45 C	46 H	47 M	48 H	49 K	50 E	51 A	52 S	53 K	54 M		
55 V	56 K	57 S	58 V	59 G	60 M	61 C	62 U	63 A	64 V	65 K	66 E	67 B	68 H	69 P	70 G	71 J		
72 O	73 P	74 K	75 A	76 H	77 D	78 L	79 P	80 J	81 O	82 R	83 E	84 T	85 C	86 H	87 L			
88 T	89 L	90 H	91 D	92 F	93 N	94 C	95 H	96 A	97 V	98 B	99 K	100 D	101 G	102 B	103 A	104 L	105 S	
106 M	107 H	108 O	109 C	110 I	111 E	112 S	113 C	114 N	115 F	116 A	117 E	118 D	119 R	120 J	121 B	122 N		
123 K	124 G	125 J	126 C	127 P	128 V	129 R	130 O	131 T	132 N	133 C	134 P	135 V	136 H	137 P	138 U			
139 Q	140 B	141 C	142 S	143 G	144 B	145 D	146 A	147 K	148 H	149 R	150 G	151 O	152 U	153 L	154 C	155 F	156 L	157 H
158 O	159 T	160 L	161 H	162 G	163 T	164 F	165 T	166 O	167 M	168 B	169 J	170 C	171 E	172 D	173 J			
174 A	175 O	176 B																

When properly filled in, the letters in the box form a quotation from a Canadian book. Find the letters by solving the clues below and writing the answers in the numbered spaces provided. Then transfer the letters from the spaces to the appropriate squares in the box. The first letters of each answered clue form the name of the author and title of the book (solution next month).

- A. Hrant Alianak play (2 wds.) 37 16 75 174 51 146 25 63
- B. Encyclopaedia entry for *Animal Spirits* author (2 wds.) 121 102 144 38 98 176 140 32
- C. *A Canadian Tragedy* author (2 wds.) 61 113 154 109 13 126 45 94
- D. French term for "Ojibwa" 4 91 14 145 77 33 100 172
- E. Publishing firm founded in 1969 (2 wds.) 19 111 171 50 117 66 8 83
- F. Computer mode 115 24 92 155 164
- G. Service station sign (3 wds.) 143 150 101 5 162 59 10 124
- H. Act as a priest 90 15 68 148 95 107 46 76
- I. Italian game 110 84 34 2
- J. '60s Toronto literary quarterly 80 29 125 71 22 169 173 120
- K. *Acis in Oxford* author (2 wds.) 5 74 21 12 123 53 99 65
- L. Whitehorse tale (2 wds.) 89 156 160 87 153 26 43 78
- M. _____ *Fire*, Jane Rule title (2 wds.) 18 1 106 60 47 54 40 167
- N. Quint visage, in England (2 wds.) 157 93 86 132 114 122 11 161
- O. Bactrian camel features (2 wds.) 151 81 31 108 158 36 130 72
- P. Rushed 79 137 73 69 134 41 127
- Q. Goes with flow 175 139 166
- R. Yves Thériault novel 82 28 119 7 149 129
- S. With "Garden," kind of club (2 wds.) 17 105 42 112 52 142 57
- T. Name of Toronto radio station (2 wds.) 163 131 159 89 30 165
- U. Simian epic, perhaps 62 138 152 48 20
- V. Carries off by force 64 55 135 27 35 128 97 58

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC #63 on page 56



Shrouding Talent

by DOUGLAS FETHERLING

IMAGINE a group photograph of that famous first generation of Canadian modernist poets, the ones centred around McGill in the 1920s. There's F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith and Leon Edel and A. M. Klein and John Glassco. But one figure has no face, only a dotted line or schematic border showing the shape of his head. This would be Leo Kennedy, the least studied but the one whom all the others predeceased. Kennedy is now the subject of *As Though Life Mattered: Leo Kennedy's Story* (McGill-Queen's University Press), an illuminating portrait by the literary biographer Patricia Morley.

The title comes from one of Kennedy's poems, "Self-Epitaph — To Be Carved in Salt":

*His heart was brittle,
His wits were scattered;
He wrote of dying
As though life mattered.*

The lines are found in *The Shrouding*, his first (and only) full collection of verse, published by Macmillan in 1933, a few years before he moved to the United States and, insofar as Canadian literature was concerned, disappeared from sight for about 40 years. Morley turns to Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* in search of explanations for the course of Kennedy's career. She might just as easily have looked to Matthew Josephson, the American expat editor in 1920s Paris, who then became a stockbroker and writer of popular business histories — and outlived those who didn't. Or she could have used

Bertram Brooker, the Canadian novelist and early abstractionist painter who became publisher of *Marketing*, the advertising trade paper, and slowly disappeared from artistic view. For Kennedy, too, was in the advertising business, first in Montreal and Toronto, later in Detroit, then in Chicago (the big time, where his career peaked), and finally in Minneapolis. Like Max Eastman, the influential American editor whose Marxist beliefs Kennedy shared during the Depression, he spent the end of his working life (until 1976, when he returned to Canada for a decade) at the headquarters of *Reader's Digest*.

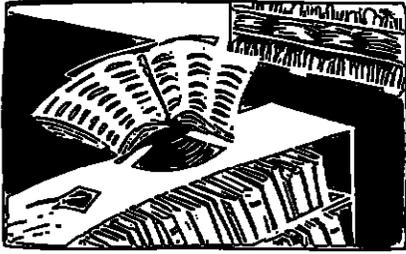
There are those who would say that Kennedy, for all the historical importance of his early literary associations, had a small, transient talent as a creative writer, or that, in a particularly American/Scott Fitzgerald kind of a way, he failed to take responsibility for his talent (the process by which so many promising novelists of the 1920s and '30s became cynical, hard-bitten Hollywood screenwriters of the '40s and '50s). Even Kennedy's own son, according to Morley, characterizes him as "a guy who was desperately insecure, taking solace in a successful career in advertising" — a person who "hasn't written anything [valuable] in 30 years."

Morley will have none of that. In this most unusual, affectionate, and engaging — if sometimes carelessly edited — book, she defends her subject with the tenacity of a loyal and understanding friend, by exploring rather than skirting the insecurities to which the younger Kennedy referred. Indeed,

they are at the heart of her between-the-lines explanation of why Kennedy's life took the turn it did, American citizenship and all.

Kennedy was a Liverpoolian, born in 1907, whose family came to Canada for a better life in 1912, just as they had earlier gone to England from Ireland. They did succeed, but Kennedy was still a working-class Montrealer. If this was the source of his sincere political beliefs (which he would later repudiate for the good life in America), it was also the cause of his low status among the Montreal group. F. R. Scott would say to his face that Kennedy always remained "a Point St. Charles tough." Kennedy thought Leon Edel had similar class bias against him, so he accused Edel of "messing with the dead" (in his famous four-volume life of Henry James) instead of grappling with real life. Klein was the one he was closest to perhaps. But then even Klein, while coming out of the Jewish ghetto, was still a McGill old boy. Kennedy could claim only a grade six separate school education as the foundation for his impressive autodidacticism.

He was never one of the lads. Not the right sort of chap at all. While the others had small inheritances or teaching appointments or roles in the professions or at least (like Klein) rich patrons, Kennedy had only his wits by which to support his family. Although he would always remain a voracious reader, he soon ceased being an active participant in literature. Once that happens, a person might as well move to the States. ♦



Off the Bridal Path

by ALEC McEWEN

NEW INNOVATIONS. A columnist in the *Mensa Canada* magazine *mc²* claimed that Hollywood seemed to be running out of "innovative new styles" by the time the 1970s arrived. If so, the industry may have had to return to its ancient old styles, especially if it felt the need to adopt a redundant adjective.

TARIFFICATION. The enclosure of *tariffication* by quotation marks in a *Financial Post* article suggests reluctance to admit as correct usage a word that now describes the replacement of Canadian supply-management quotas for poultry and dairy products by a series of diminishing import levies. Yet *tariffication*, though perhaps not widely used before the GATT negotiations, entered the language a hundred years ago and is equivalent to the accepted French *tarification*.

BENCHMARKING, an unfamiliar noun that does not mean the inscription of initials or love declarations on public seats, is defined by the *Financial Post* as "the technique of beating tough and recognized industry standards." In its original topographic sense, a *benchmark* is a permanent reference point from which the relative elevation of other positions on the earth's surface can be determined. Figuratively, it means anything that serves as a basis for comparative measurement. *Benchmarking* now takes its place with other industrial jargon as a term for quality improvement or target-setting.

SUBSUME. The Ottawa editor of *Maclean's* suggested that Canada's aging baby boomers favoured the election of "yesterday's man" as prime minister because they were "subsumed with nostalgia." *Subsume* means to bring something under, or incorporate it in, something else. The retrospective voters may have been suffused with nostalgia. In that case, their number might be subsumed under the heading "nostalgia" to indicate the percentage of the electorate who voted for that reason.

UNWITTING. A CANCOPY item in the Writers' Union of Canada's newsletter, concerning illegal photocopying, reported that "Many people unwittingly break the law every day without realizing it." *Unwitting* means inadvertent or lacking knowledge, so "without realizing it" is redundant. In any event, ignorance of the law is no defence to a charge of breaking it.

CONCESSION. A guest editorialist in *Maclean's*, reminiscing about his visit to Saskatchewan as a young Ontarian 40 years ago, remembered an impatient driver who turned his car "off a muddy concession road" to cut across an open field. There are no concession roads in western Canada. In fact, a *concession* is not even a road; it is a row of lots lying between the original road allowances in certain Ontario and Quebec townships. It is so named because the land was conceded, or set aside, by the Crown for allocation to settlers.

OLIHAT. In noting the death of Sammy Taft, an 80-year-old Toronto hatter, *Maclean's* described him as "credited with coining the hockey phrase 'hat trick'" because of his donation of a hat to any player who scored three goals during a Maple Leafs home game in the 1930s. Credited by whom? The expression *hat trick* originated in the English game of cricket about 40 years before Taft was born. It applied to a bowler who took three wickets with successive balls, a difficult feat that was rewarded by the club's presentation of a new hat or some equivalent prize.

COVET. Defence Minister David Collette is reported to have said of Canadian troops in Bosnia "we obviously covet very much their safety and their ability to do the proper job." To *covet*, in its ordinary sense, is to eagerly desire the possession of something that belongs to someone else. Perhaps the minister meant to express his concern for the peacekeepers' well-being, or he may simply have been envious of their security arrangements and professional competence.

BRIDLE, BRIDAL. The head of the Calgary Equestrian Advisory Committee might well have bridled at being quoted by a local magazine as saying that her organization's riders "try to stay on established bridal paths" and should not be blamed for damaging trails used by hikers and bikers. But who cares where people get married, so long as they don't do it in the street and frighten the horses? ♦

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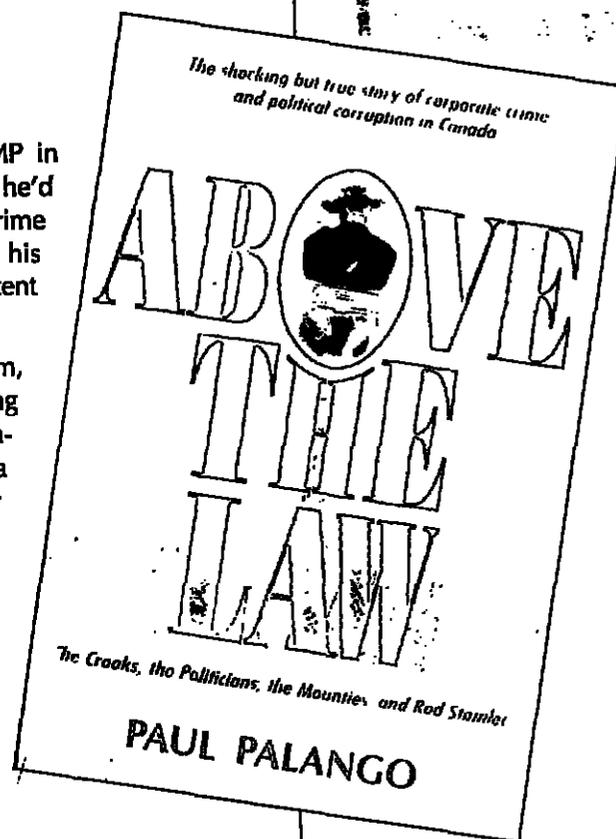
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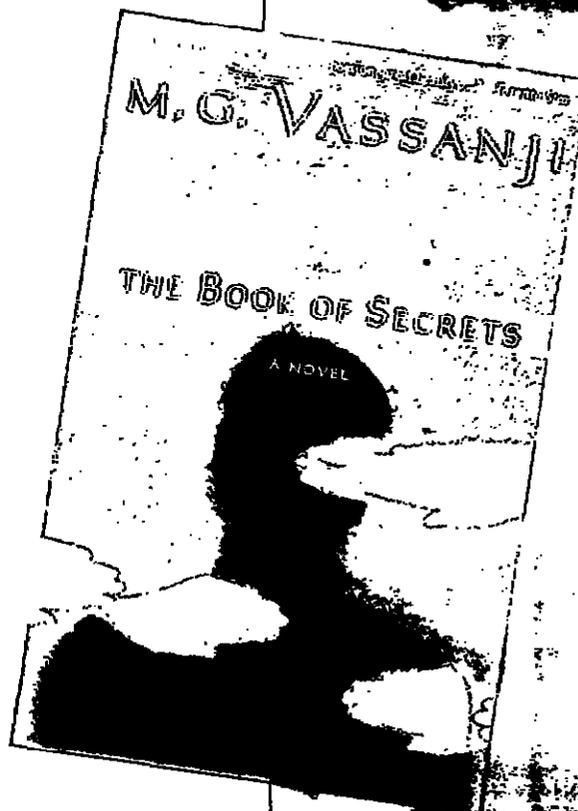
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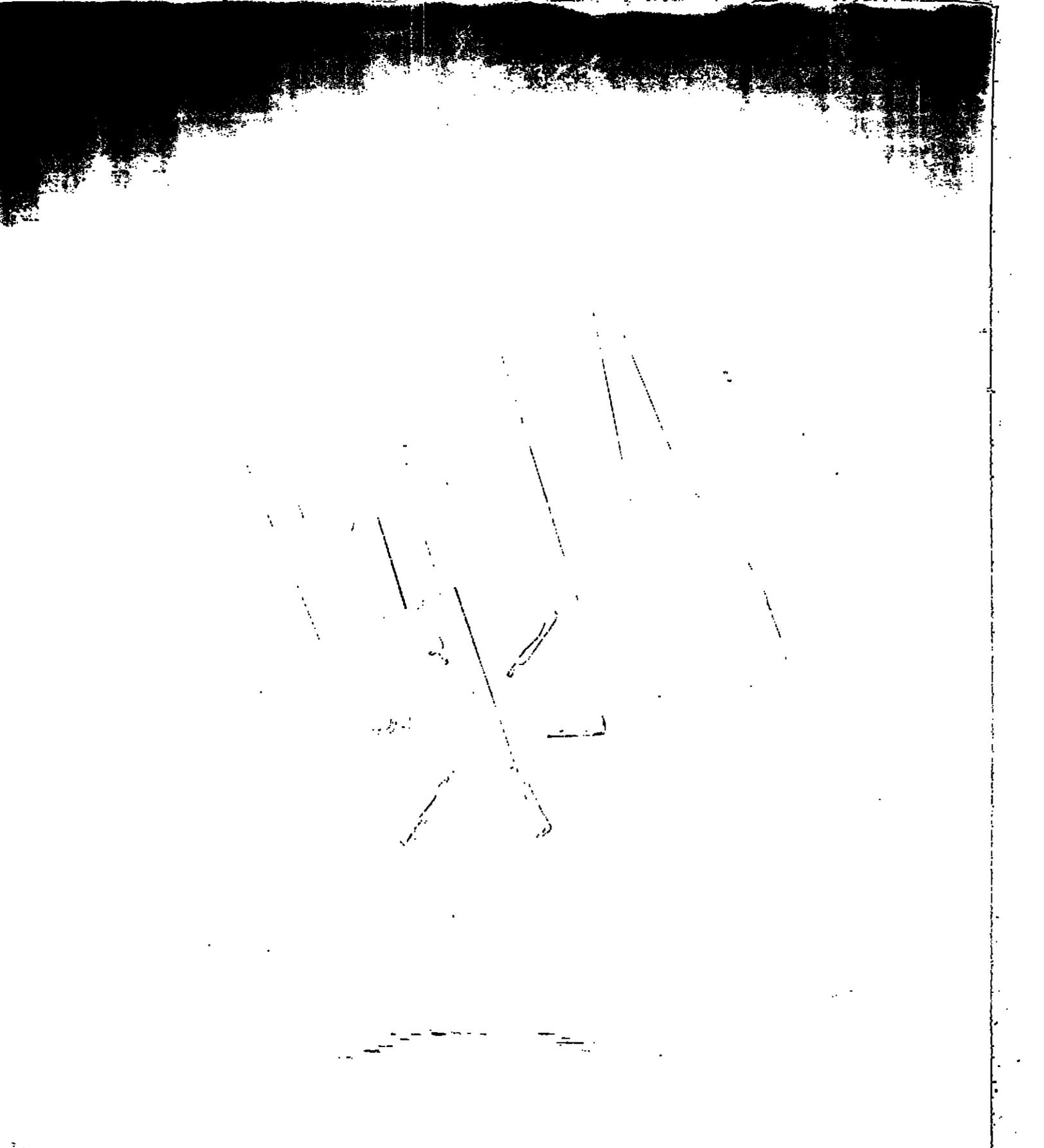


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